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**Rural Labour Regimes in North Kordofan:
Work, Family, and Categorical Violence in
Sudan**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD/MPhil

2024

Department of Development Studies

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis, grounded in primary research conducted in North Kordofan, Sudan, examines how Sudan's rural labour regimes perpetuate and regenerate violence through what it introduces as 'categorical violence'. This framework explores how classifications embedded in social networks—such as race, gender, ethnicity, and religion—determine who can access work, under what conditions, and how various types of labour are valued or overlooked. The findings reveal that these entrenched categories, upheld by historical and power structures, do more than define labour opportunities; they embed inequalities that reinforce socio-economic hierarchies and sustain exclusion and exploitation.

Through a socio-political and historical analysis, this study examines the social meanings and classifications assigned to everyday work, including the often-invisible contributions of social reproductive labour. It explores access to work as shaped by mechanisms involving family, state, and citizenship. These analyses reveal that labour classification, valuation, and access are mediated in ways that perpetuate patriarchy and reinforce racial, gender, and ethnic hierarchies. Rooted in networks of kinship, political, and social affiliations, family emerges as a pivotal institution shaping labour roles, facilitating job access, and, in the name of 'family' or 'love', simultaneously sustaining and regenerating restrictive social structures that limit opportunities and perpetuate exclusion. This layered analysis uncovers the complex and nuanced ways in which labour opportunities, classifications, and valuations of everyday work are navigated in Sudan's rural labour regimes.

The research also critiques donor-funded peacebuilding initiatives centred on employment generation projects using vocational training. It shows that donor agencies, by uncritically depending on national labour data assessments, narrowing their focus to skills-based interventions founded on flawed understandings of violence, and aligning with the Islamist government's interests, have inadvertently bolstered existing power imbalances. Rather than reaching the most vulnerable, these programmes have often failed to adapt to Sudan's complex labour realities, reflecting limited understanding of the local socio-political context and institutional blindness due to a lack of reflective positionality.

Ultimately, this thesis offers a fresh perspective on violence, on work and labour, and on the connections between them, challenging simplified employment categories and narrow

views on work access. It reveals how development agencies' institutional dynamics shape these structures, highlighting the visible and hidden forms of violence that sustain inequality and marginalisation within rural labour regimes.

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Acronyms

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
COW	Correlates of War project
DDR	Disarmament, Disbandment, and Reintegration
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
EG	Employment Generation
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FEWS Net	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
HAC	Humanitarian Aid Commission
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP/s	Internally Displaced Person/s
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO/s	International Non-Governmental Organisation/s
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LLCR	Local Labour Control Regime
LM/s	Labour Market/s
LR/s	Labour Regime/s
MoHRDL	Ministry of Human Resources Development and Labour
NCE	Neo Classical Economics
NCP	National Congress Party
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIF	National Islamic Front

NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
PDM	Project Design Matrix
PLM	Project Logic Model
RU/s	Residential Unit/s
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAF	Sudanese Armed Forces
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCVTA	Supreme Council for Vocational Training and Apprenticeship
SDG	Sudanese Pounds
SLFS	Sudan Labour Force Survey
SLM	Segmented Labour Market
SMoF	State Ministry of Finance
SNA	System of National Accounts
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
STV	Space, Time, and Violence Framework
ToT	Training of the Trainers
TS/s	Technical School/s
TUS	Time Use Survey
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VT	Vocational Training
VT/EG	Vocational Training/Employment Generation
VTC/s	Vocational Training Centre/s
WFP	World Food Programme

Glossary

Aamal haamshiyya	Marginal work
Abbala	Camel herders, camel herding
Abd/Abeed	Slave/s, an ethnic slur for 'Black' people in Sudan
An-Nisa	'The Women', referring to the fourth chapter of the Quran
Ansar	The Mahdi's devoted followers
Auretti	An oxen driver (in river-based agriculture, such as in Dongola)
Awlad al-jenna	Children of the heaven, referring to Kezan youth, especially protégés of Haroun in the context of Kordofan
Baggara	Cattle herders, cattle herding
Bilal al-Sudan	The land of the 'Blacks'
Dar	Homeland
Dhimmis	'Special' non-Muslim members of Islamic societies
Dokhon	Millet
Doraa	White sorghum
Feddan	A measurement of land used in non-western Sudan and some Arab countries, such as Egypt and Syria; one feddan is equivalent to 1.7 mokhamas, 0.42 hectares, or 104 acres.
Gerdud	Soil mixed with clay and sand
Gharraba	Westerners (Sudanese) who originate from Darfur and Kordofan
Gibraka	Home garden (Kordofan)
Hakkama (f)/Hakkamat (pl-f)	Traditional folk poetess/es
Ingaz/Inqas	'Salvation' referring to the NIF/NCP government that came into power in 1989
Jallaba	Traders from Northern Riverain tribes
Janjaweed	Darfur-based armed militias created by the SAF
Jez	Grass for animals
Jihad	'Struggling' and the 'holy' war
Kezan (plural male)/Koz(m)/Koza (f)	Pejorative nicknames for El-Bashir and his regime, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, and members and supporters of the NCP
Khalwa	An elementary Quranic school
Khatmiyya	One of the two main Sufi orders in Sudan
Khor	Seasonal river
Mahadiyya	The Mahdist, one of the two main Sufi orders in Sudan
Makhraf	A designated resting place for cows

Malwa	A tin circular container used to scale agricultural goods in the market
Mokhamas	A measurement of land used in western Sudan. One mokhamas is equivalent to 0.25 hectares/0.6 acres.
Mujahideen	Holy fighters
Muwallid	People who are born in Sudan to non-Sudanese parents
Nafir	Village work party, mobilisation
Nazir	Tribal chief
Omda	Middle-level tribal chief
Rasoum	Fees
Sababu	(Sierra Leonean term) A resourceful, well-connected person, or social network-based intermediation
Samad	A supervisor (in river-based agriculture, such as in Dongola)
Saqiya	The water-wheel system in river-based agriculture, such as in Dongola
Senniya	Sudanese metal tray on which dishes are served
Sharia	Islamic law
Sheikh/a	Village chief or Islamic leader
Sheil	Rural money lending system
Shimalyyin	Northerners or Northern Sudanese, usually from Khartoum or those born along the Nile Valley, the most socio-economically powerful in Sudan
Shogol youmiya	Daily work
Tamakana	Two-piece shirt suit, popularly worn by the Ministers and Kezan during the El-Bashir regime. Also known as safari.
Tamkeen	'Empowerment', referring to the period of Islamist reform under the Ingaz regime
Tijjaniya	A Sufi sect popular in western Sudan
(El-)Torda	Man-made lake in El-Rahad
Turabla	Those workers under the supervision of the supervisor (samad) (in river-based agriculture, such as in Dongola)
Um chico	A kind of vegetation used for building a house
Umrah	Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca that takes place any time of the year
Wakeel	Deputy tribal chief
Wali	Governor, Guardian of the Islamic state
Wasta	Personal intermediation/intermediator
Wilayah	State or province of the core Islamic State
Zakat	The third pillar of Islam, which is a donation that Muslims regard as a mandatory act within Islamic faith
Zarabia	Sugar-coated Sudanese doughnuts

Zariba

Northern traders' quarters

Zurga

A derogatory term for people of 'African' tribes or darker
Sudanese

Exchange Rates

Sudanese Pound (SDG) to United States Dollar (USD)

From January to October 2019

Black Market Rate: 1 USD = 60 SDG

Official Rate: 1 USD = 47 SDG

In November 2022

Black Market Rate: 1 USD = 580 SDG

Official Rate: 1 USD = 568 SDG

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Context and Rationale

In 2013, during a visit to a state-run vocational training centre (VTC) in Khartoum, Sudan, a technical expert working with a JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency)-funded vocational training for employment generation (VT/EG) project made a strikingly candid observation. He noted that vocational training does not necessarily lead to employment, despite project frameworks built on the assumption that it does. This critical perspective confirmed doubts I had long held about the effectiveness of these VT/EG interventions, which were assumed to address both economic development and peacebuilding by promoting employability. These projects rested on the widely accepted premise that training leads to employment (Becker 1964; Mincer 1974), that unemployment is a major driver of conflict (Becker 1968; Collier and Hoeffler 2000, 2004), and that equipping marginalised youth with skills could prevent them from joining rebel groups and foster long-term stability (World Bank 2003). As Japan's country assistance policy for Sudan states, "vocational training is positioned as support for peace consolidation, and it is expected to contribute to poverty reduction, including the reintegration of disarmed soldiers, by strengthening the vocational training system" (JICA, IDCJ, and Koei 2021:3–1).

Yet, despite the expert's pragmatic insights, two VT/EG projects I was involved with later that year concluded with positive evaluations and it was decided to proceed to the second phase. Despite its overall 'success' evaluation, which seemed increasingly out of step with Sudan's labour realities, one report underscored a key issue—the limitations of employment rate as a reliable indicator of vocational training impact (JICA 2013b). Employment outcomes depend not only on the training provided but also on external economic conditions, highlighting how narrow metrics obscure deeper issues around job access and sustainability (Cramer 2015; Enria 2018) in Sudan's complex labour landscape. This experience also underscored broader limitations in development frameworks based on the selective application of human capital theory and supply-side approaches (Amsden 2010), which assume that vocational training is a pathway to stable employment and peace.

As my work progressed, I became increasingly uneasy with the underlying logic of these interventions. Although VT/EG remained central to development and peacebuilding assistance in post-conflict settings (Izzi 2020; Ralston 2014)—not only in Sudan but also in my previous roles in Afghanistan, Angola, and Northern Uganda—my experiences raised questions about whether these projects were genuinely capable of achieving sustainable peace. The socio-economic realities of Sudan painted a different picture—university graduates struggled to find formal employment (Pantuliano et al. 2011) and worked as tuk-tuk drivers or other precarious work, and training often led only to temporary work that dissipated as soon as project evaluations concluded. These structural issues seemed irreconcilable with the belief that vocational training could substantively contribute to peace in a context where armed conflict in regions like Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei persisted (Idris 2012; Jok 2001, 2007; Reeves 2014).

Moreover, within Khartoum's elite neighbourhoods, development work often felt detached from the complex realities of Sudan's peripheral regions, where violence continued unabated. Many international colleagues and Sudanese friends—even those involved directly in development efforts—were unfamiliar with the specificities of conflict outside Khartoum, despite these issues being central to the work of development organisations (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004). In air-conditioned offices guarded by security, far removed from the dusty, often harsh conditions of conflict-affected regions, the pressing needs of these areas frequently turned into abstract figures—data points on reports rather than reflections of lived realities (Srinivasan 2021). Over time, my sense of disconnection from the communities we claimed to support deepened, as did my awareness of my own positionality (Mwambari 2019). I began to question how meaningful my contributions could be within an institutional framework that prioritised predefined project success metrics over a nuanced understanding of Sudan's labour and conflict dynamics.

This thesis emerges from that tension, driven by a need to critically reassess the assumptions underlying VT/EG and similar development initiatives in conflict-affected regions. Moving beyond simplified indicators and assumptions, this study seeks to investigate the socio-political complexities surrounding labour regimes in Sudan, examining how classifications, social structures, (Foucault 1973; Tilly 1999), and access mechanisms (Peluso and Ribot 2003, 2020) influence who participates in labour markets, under what

conditions, and to what effect. Through the lens of ‘categorical violence’, this research examines how entrenched systems of classification based on race, gender, ethnicity, and religion intersect in recognising certain types of labour (Fraser 1995) and determining labour opportunities (Fine 1998). These classifications reinforce socio-economic hierarchies, revealing how peacebuilding interventions may inadvertently perpetuate enduring patterns of inequality and marginalisation.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

This thesis challenges the specific economic frameworks—‘theory of change’—that underpin many international peacebuilding policies, because they only employ selective applications of versions of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and neo-classical macroeconomic views. Human capital theory (Becker 1964; Mincer 1962) posits that investing in education and skills increases employability, leading to better economic opportunities. Rational choice theory (Becker 1968; Buchanan and Tullock 1969; Stigler and Becker 1977) suggests that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis—if stable employment is available, the opportunity cost of engaging in violence rises, making violence less attractive. Neo-classical macroeconomic theory (Kuznets 1973; Lewis 1954) views unemployment as determined by the balance of supply and demand within the labour market, implying that a mismatch between the labour supply and the labour demand would result in unemployment. In this context, ‘Say’s Law’ (1834), specifically its human capital version, suggests that increasing the supply of trained workers will naturally generate its own demand, leading to employment.

The selective application of these neo-classical economic theories propose a direct, almost mechanistic link between unemployment and violence, suggesting that employment generation, particularly through skills training, reduces the likelihood of violent conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2000, 2004; World Bank 2003). As outlined in recent literature (Blattman and Annan 2015; Brück et al. 2021; Izzi 2020), these interventions are built on the premise that unemployed individuals, especially young men, are more likely to engage in violence if they lack economic opportunities. Consequently, peacebuilding efforts often focus on vocational training to enhance employability and reduce poverty, assuming that

increased employment opportunities raise the ‘opportunity cost’ of engaging in violence (Collier 2009; Urdal 2004). However, this thesis questions the simplicity of these assumptions and highlights the limited empirical support for this causal link.

The central critique here is that these economic frameworks selectively apply concepts from neo-classical economics—such as the assumption of rational actors and the predictability of economic incentives—without accounting for the socio-political and structural complexities that fuel violence in conflict-affected areas (Cramer 2015; Enria 2018). By prioritising economic incentives and individual rationality, these frameworks often overlook the multifaceted causes of violence, including deeply embedded social hierarchies, historical injustices, and political exclusions, all of which shape individuals’ lives and choices. This narrow focus results in policy interventions that fail to engage with the root causes of conflict, particularly in settings where the socio-political structures differ vastly from those of industrialised economies (Autesserre 2014).

This thesis aims to broaden the scope of analysis by engaging with alternative perspectives on labour, violence, and peacebuilding, integrating insights from political economy (Amsden 2010; Cramer 2002, 2009; Enria 2018; Fine 1998; Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008; Mahmoud 1984; O’Brien 1983), labour regime analysis (Breman 1996; Burawoy 1985; Jonas 1996, 2009; Mezzadri 2016; Sender and Cramer 2022; Wells 1996), and feminist political economy (Bhattacharya 2017; Elias and Rai 2019; Federici 1975; Fraser 2013; Mezzadri, Newman, and Stevano 2022a; Stevano et al. 2021). By situating this study within broader theoretical debates on power (Foucault 2001), inequality (Tilly 1999), and violence (Bourgois 2003; Farmer 1996; Scheper-Hughes 1992), the research underscores how structural (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969a) and symbolic (Bourdieu 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004) forms of violence, embedded in social institutions and economic classifications, perpetuate cycles of conflict (Bourgois 2004; Cockburn 2009) and hinder meaningful peacebuilding outcomes. In examining these theoretical challenges, this research advances a more comprehensive understanding of labour and violence, and the connection between them, critiquing the reductionist assumptions of neo-classical economics and demonstrating the need for peacebuilding policies that acknowledge the complex realities of conflict-affected regions like Sudan.

1.3 Focus and Scope

1.3.1 Scope and Thematic Boundaries

This thesis investigates the nuanced dynamics of Sudan's rural labour regimes, centring on North Kordofan to examine how classifications and mechanisms of access operate within a complex socio-political landscape. Through this lens, it explores how labour classifications rooted in race, gender, ethnicity, and religion influence the categorisation, valuation, and accessibility of work, as well as the everyday relations shaped by these categories (Tilly 1999). The research questions how, and to what extent, peacebuilding interventions by donor agencies, built on simplified assumptions about employment and violence, contribute to sustainable employment and peacebuilding outcomes in Sudan (Autesserre 2014; Cramer 2006a). Specifically, it critiques the reliance on two central assumptions: that vocational training alone directly leads to employment (Becker 1964; Mincer 1974), and that employment subsequently reduces violence (Becker 1968; Collier and Hoeffler 2000, 2004).

Focusing on the variation within the rural town of El-Rahad in North Kordofan, this thesis investigates intra-locality diversity and multiplicity across neighbourhoods and workplaces, examining how social memberships and networks shape both the categorisation and valuation of work (Fraser 1995; Tilly 1999) and access to labour opportunities (Fine 1998; Peluso and Ribot 2003, 2020). By exploring El-Rahad's diverse socio-economic landscape, the study reveals localised differences that influence labour classification, valuation, and access, offering insights into the social hierarchies that define employment opportunities and reinforce entrenched socio-political structures within rural Sudan.

El-Rahad was selected not only for its unique setting as a conflict-affected rural town and a centre of a new locality, but also because it hosted a vocational training and employment generation (VT/EG) project designed to foster peace through employment. This project provided a focal point for analysing how peacebuilding interventions interact with existing social and political realities (Cramer 2006b, 2015). By examining institutional dynamics of labour data collection and analysis, and of national implementation partners, especially on intervention logic-making, power dynamics around partners and target selection, this research challenges the assumption that vocational training alone generates employment and that employment alone reduces violence. Instead, it highlights how specific social

contexts shape the outcomes of these interventions and how the institutional dynamics around peacebuilding interventions are already embedded within structures that sustain and regenerate exclusion and marginalisation—forms of symbolic and structural violence (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b; Bourdieu 2001).

Through this place-based (Jonas 2009), intra-El-Rahad focus, the thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of rural labour regimes in conflict-affected settings. By investigating the specific socio-political landscapes within El-Rahad, the thesis offers a contextualised framework for understanding rural labour dynamics and the socio-economic factors that influence the success and limitations of peacebuilding interventions.

1.3.2 Categorical Violence and the Politics of Classification in Sudanese Labour Regimes

This thesis develops the concept of categorical violence, expanding on Tilly's (1999) notion of categorical inequality, to provide a critical framework for analysing how classification systems function within North Kordofan's rural labour regimes. Categorical violence explains how systems of classification—far from being neutral or purely administrative—shape access to work, employment conditions, and the social valuation of labour (Foucault 1973). By assigning greater legitimacy and value to certain types of work while marginalising others, these classifications entrench socio-economic hierarchies along lines of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion. This hierarchical valuation reinforces the exclusion and marginalisation of groups who perform undervalued or unpaid labour, particularly in social reproductive roles, which are crucial to sustaining society but are systematically overlooked by policymakers and researchers (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 1975; Fraser 1995; Mezzadri et al. 2022a).

The lens of racial capitalism further enriches the concept of categorical violence by illuminating how racial and ethnic classifications have historically structured Sudan's labour regimes, supporting both economic exploitation and social exclusion (Robinson 1983; Al-Bulushi 2022). Sudan's labour history reveals how medieval and colonial classifications—rooted in distinctions of skin colour and perceived labour traits—pushed darker-skinned groups into slavery and subsequent forms of coerced or devalued labour (Ḥasan 1973; Hill

1959; Spaulding 1985). After the formal abolition of slavery, colonial authorities continued to use racial classifications to assign former slaves and darker-skinned Sudanese to the lowest strata of wage labour, often in exploitative jobs that reinforced both economic marginalisation and social stigmatisation (Ewald 1990; Sikainga 1996). This process illustrates the mechanisms of categorical inequality, such as opportunity hoarding and exploitation, which preserved racialised hierarchies by restricting access to more prestigious roles to lighter-skinned elites (Abdelsalam 2008; Jok 2007; Mahmoud 1984).

By introducing categorical violence as an analytical lens, this thesis demonstrates how Sudan's labour regimes perpetuate violence not only through visible control or coercion but also through structural, symbolic, and interpersonal mechanisms that institutionalise exclusion and unrecognition (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b; Scheper-Hughes 1992). The concept builds on Tilly's (1999) mechanisms of inequality—exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation—to reveal how classification-based hierarchies sustain and reproduce social inequalities across generations. Through these mechanisms, Sudan's labour regimes reinforce divisions by pairing categories such as 'male/female' or 'dark-skinned/light-skinned' with specific work roles and social values. This pairing process, also central to racial capitalism, assigns higher value to the labour of dominant social groups, systematically devaluing and marginalising darker-skinned Sudanese ethnic minorities, whose labour remains invisible or undervalued in both local and broader economic structures (Robinson 1983; Sikainga 1996; Mamdani 1996).

This conceptualisation challenges conventional approaches to labour and violence, which often reduce labour to monetarily productive employment and frame violence as simply the absence of employment. Rather, categorical violence exposes the continuum of violence (Bourgeois 2004; Cockburn 2009)—both visible and invisible—embedded within systems of classification, revealing how social hierarchies operate at multiple levels within Sudan's labour regimes. For example, racial capitalism continues to influence Northern Riverain Arab elites' perceptions of darker-skinned Sudanese, who are often assigned to the lowest-paying jobs, deemed 'unfit' for higher-level employment, and portrayed as 'primitive' or inferior (Abdelsalam 2008; Sikainga 1996). These depictions reflect a form of everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992) that intertwines with symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant

2004), casting darker-skinned groups or women as inherently 'less valuable' within Sudanese labour hierarchies (Bernal 1990; Ewald 1990; O'Brien 1998; Sikainga 1996).

1.3.3 Examination of Labour Classification and Access

This research highlights often-overlooked aspects of classification and access within labour studies, particularly in settings where large-scale national data may obscure local labour dynamics and reinforce hierarchical social classifications. Focusing on the rural town of El-Rahad, this study examines local labour classifications and the social meanings assigned to everyday work, including frequently invisible forms such as social reproductive (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 1975) and informal labour (Breman 1996; Standing 2011). These categories reveal the types of work sustaining rural life yet often unaccounted for in official data, underlining how historical and social hierarchies shape perceptions of labour's value. By exploring both 'dream' and 'dirty' work, the study traces the historical roots of classifications, demonstrating their ties to social status and the local socio-political landscape.

Labour classifications not only regulate who gains access to work but also embody multiple forms of invisible violence. These forms include structural violence (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969a), which systematically restricts access to labour protections and essential resources, symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), which devalues certain types of work through cultural norms, and everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992), which manifests in routine labour practices that sustain exploitation. In Sudan, women are culturally associated with motherhood and are often confined to roles linked to nurturing and caregiving (Ismail and Makki 1990; Mernissi 1987). This form of symbolic violence, which restricts women's roles through cultural and religious norms, reinforces structural violence by excluding certain types of labour—such as unpaid reproductive work—from social and economic recognition. As a result, women's access to social protections and economic resources remains limited (Kevane and Stiansen 2006), and their wages stagnate at lower levels (Maglad 1998). This invisibility of reproductive labour in official frameworks facilitates its economic exploitation, forcing women into dependency and precarity (Mezzadri 2019). The exclusion of certain forms of work from recognition (Fraser 1995, 2000) exemplifies how

labour categories function as instruments of both structural and symbolic violence, perpetuating the social invisibility and economic vulnerability of those engaged in unpaid but essential work.

Access to work in El-Rahad is shaped not only by the economic demands of the labour market but also by broader social forces, including family networks, ethnic ties, and local power structures. Drawing on Ribot and Peluso's (2003) "bundle of powers" framework, this study examines how family networks, state control, and socio-political affiliations mediate access to specific jobs. The historical dominance of particular families and ethnic groups in El-Rahad, documented by Mahmoud (1984), reveals how powerful social networks restrict access to certain types of work. This restriction exemplifies opportunity hoarding, one of Tilly's mechanisms of inequality, which ensures that access to valuable labour opportunities remains limited to those within influential networks. As in many post-colonial societies, these classifications of labour in Sudan carry legacies of pre-colonial and colonial-era hierarchies, where specific roles were reserved for particular racial and ethnic groups, reinforcing divisions based on social membership. For example, darker-skinned Sudanese groups historically relegated to slave labour now face systemic exclusion from more desirable roles, as these historical divisions persist within the structures of labour markets (Sikainga 1996; Jok 2015).

The exclusion and devaluation of informal and seasonal workers serve as forms of structural and everyday violence. Workers in informal sectors often remain invisible in official classifications, which exacerbates their economic precarity and denies them access to labour rights (Breman 1996; Martin 2009). This invisibility, inherent in structural violence, entrenches socio-economic inequalities and reinforces the precarious conditions faced by marginalised workers. The undervaluation of informal labour, despite its essential economic contributions, systematically denies these workers social security and formal recognition, further perpetuating their marginalisation and economic instability (Standing 2018).

In the case of Sudan, these forms of violence intersect within El-Rahad's labour regime. Here, the local labour regime enforces socio-economic hierarchies, with structural and symbolic violence reinforcing the historical divisions that exclude particular groups from full participation in economic life. This marginalisation extends to non-physical forms of violence, as those relegated to informal, seasonal, or low-status work are subjected to

routines of control, exclusion, and unrecognised exploitation (Banaji 2010; Sender and Cramer 2022). Everyday acts of discrimination and social marginalisation thus create a continuum of violence, where even seemingly minor acts of exclusion reinforce a systemic pattern that limits economic access for specific social groups (Bourgois 2004).

In conclusion, this study shows that access to work in El-Rahad cannot be fully understood through economic logic alone (Fine 1998; Prasch 2003). It must be examined through the socio-political forces that shape labour classifications, reinforce invisible forms of violence, and maintain social hierarchies. By analysing El-Rahad's labour regime through these dynamics, the study highlights the importance of power, historical context, and social relations (Foucault 2001; Lerche 2022; Tilly 1999) in shaping labour classification and access, providing a nuanced understanding of labour regimes in Sudan's rural context.

1.3.4 Understanding Labour Markets as Labour Regimes

The conventional economic frameworks that guide international peacebuilding interventions often treat labour markets as singular, market-driven entities defined by supply and demand (Kuznets 1973; Lewis 1954). This perspective assumes that unemployment is an economic phenomenon shaped by market forces at both macro and micro levels, influenced by individual choices or 'labour market imperfections'. Consequently, these frameworks frequently overlook the socio-political factors and power dynamics that profoundly shape access to work (Fine 1998), particularly in conflict-affected settings such as Sudan (Cramer 2002). In El-Rahad, local historical and social factors, including family networks, ethnic affiliations, and socio-political hierarchies, reveal that labour access and classification cannot be fully understood through market mechanisms alone. Instead, shifting from labour markets to labour regimes enables a more nuanced analysis of how social classifications and relations define labour practices and opportunities in Sudan's rural contexts (Burawoy 1985; Wells 1996).

A labour regime approach provides a framework for understanding how access to work and workplace control mechanisms operate within specific socio-political contexts. Unlike the concept of labour markets, labour regimes encompass the formal and informal rules, power structures, and social relationships that govern labour processes (Mezzadri 2016; Selwyn

2012). The approach extends beyond individual workplaces, shaping broader employment practices and social relations. For instance, in El-Rahad, family affiliations, gender norms, and ethnic ties influence who is recruited, the conditions of work, and the nature of job roles. By framing labour access through Ribot and Peluso's (2003) "bundle of powers" and *wasta* (personal intermediation/intermediators) (Abosag and Ghauri 2022; Mann 2014; Ramady 2016), this research reveals how social networks, family hierarchies, and ethnic affiliations serve as gatekeepers in accessing different types of work. In El-Rahad's labour regimes, these social structures mediate opportunities in ways that reinforce socio-economic hierarchies, with powerful intermediaries connected to the Islamist state, influential families at the societal level, and patriarchal figures within the family playing critical roles in controlling access to valuable labour opportunities. This perspective illuminates how the control mechanisms within Local Labour Control Regimes (LLCR), as conceptualised by Jonas (1996), are also mediated by categorical violence—harms and inequalities associated with classification. It shows that labour regimes rely on more than economic determinants alone, as access to employment is continually negotiated within complex webs of social relations. These relations privilege certain groups while marginalising others, shaped by historical and socio-political factors.

Labour regimes also reveal how classification mechanisms within the workplace uphold hierarchies, impacting recruitment, compensation, and discipline (Bair 2019). In El-Rahad's local labour regimes, entrenched racial and gender classifications devalue certain types of work—such as unpaid reproductive labour—while reinforcing dominant social structures. This aligns with Baglioni et al.'s (2022) view of labour regimes as historically-shaped multidimensional phenomena influenced by both local and global dynamics. Harmful practices, such as the exclusion and devaluation of certain labour types are embedded within these regimes, perpetuating economic precarity for marginalised groups. These dynamics illustrate that, unlike labour markets, labour regimes are not self-regulating but rather maintained by social forces that sustain both exploitation and symbolic violence (Galtung 1969; Jonas 1996).

In conflict-affected settings, shifting from an economic view of labour markets to a labour regime framework provides critical insights into how peacebuilding interventions intersect with existing socio-political inequalities. Although labour regime analysis has fewer case

studies directly addressing conflict-affected contexts, physical violence, or labour-based exploitation framed as violence, this study builds on the extant labour regime literature to expand these dimensions. Furthermore, while ‘theory of change’ models often assume that job creation inherently promotes stability, a labour regime perspective reveals how entrenched classifications can reinforce marginalisation, thereby limiting the impact of peacebuilding interventions. The El-Rahad case underscores that effective interventions must extend beyond vocational training and employment generation to engage with the historical and socio-political dimensions shaping access to labour. This thesis, therefore, argues that labour regimes offer a more comprehensive framework for understanding Sudan’s rural labour dynamics, as they capture the embedded nature of labour practices within broader social hierarchies and institutional structures.

1.3.5 Interplay with Peacebuilding and Development Interventions

This research critiques internationally funded peacebuilding interventions in Sudan, particularly those relying on vocational training and employment generation (VT/EG) as primary mechanisms for fostering peace (Izzi 2020; Ralston 2014; Walton 2010). Focusing on North Kordofan, with El-Rahad as a case study for intervention targeting and impact, the analysis scrutinises national labour data collection and analysis processes that inform VT/EG interventions, revealing the reductive categorisations applied to youth and women—especially in rural areas—as groups perceived to be disproportionately affected by unemployment (MoHRDL 2014). These classifications shape the design and targeting of interventions; however, by narrowly focusing on supply-side skills training while neglecting demand-side constraints, structural inequities, and the historical dynamics shaping labour regimes, these programmes often fall short of generating employment or challenging entrenched social hierarchies (Amsden 2010; Cramer 2006b).

The thesis examines the institutional dynamics underpinning these peacebuilding efforts, analysing how labour policymakers, data enumerators, and aid organisations navigate data-driven policy frameworks that often produce oversimplified representations of Sudan's labour landscape, thus exacerbating Sudan’s already severe labour data poverty (Oya 2013) and obscuring the complex drivers of violence and conflict. Through this lens, it critiques

how these frameworks reduce nuanced socio-economic and political issues to basic metrics, which, in turn, shape policies that inadequately address or, at times, reinforce underlying structural inequalities and tensions. The analysis highlights how these dynamics contribute to a limited and selective narrative around labour and peacebuilding, frequently overlooking the deeply embedded socio-political factors that fuel marginalisation and sustain cycles of violence (Autesserre 2014; Cramer 2015).

This institutional bias is further compounded by the close partnerships between these international agencies and the Islamist state in Sudan, a government known for marginalising historically oppressed social groups through discriminatory policies (Idris 2012; Jok 2007; Verhoeven 2015; Warburg 2002). This alignment with state agendas reflects a form of institutional blindness (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004), whereby development organisations overlook the implications of local power dynamics and become complicit in sustaining the very socio-political structures that foster conflict and exclusion. The interventions, by failing to take into account Sudan's intricate power hierarchies and regional disparities, risk reinforcing these structures through their classifications of 'unemployment-prone' youth and women, which may limit the opportunities for those conforming to these rigid, state-supported classifications while further marginalising others.

This thesis argues that development interventions often impose fixed, externally derived classifications onto diverse local realities, leading to what can be termed 'categorical violence'. By uncritically partnering with local implementing agencies connected to government structures, these peacebuilding initiatives often fail to reach the most marginalised groups (Cramer and Weeks 1997; Izzi 2020). Assumptions that categorisation of target groups will lead to the automatic inclusion of those most in need overlook the influence of local power dynamics. This oversight results in the marginalisation of certain groups, rendering their labour invisible within the dominant local power structures. Consequently, these dynamics, reinforced by social connections and power hierarchies, determine who is deemed 'worthy' of support, perpetuating symbolic and structural violence by privileging those within the networked social elite while excluding those outside it. In practice, this approach undermines the peacebuilding goals of these interventions, as they fail to engage with the multi-layered social and economic factors sustaining inequality and exclusion within rural Sudanese labour regimes.

By examining how these dynamics play out within El-Rahad's labour regimes, this research reveals the limitations of VT/EG as a peacebuilding tool when it is disconnected from the socio-political and historical realities of Sudan's rural labour landscape. The findings highlight the necessity of more contextually grounded approaches that account for the interplay of historical exploitation, local power structures, and the embedded socio-political hierarchies within labour regimes. In doing so, this thesis calls for a rethinking of peacebuilding interventions that move beyond narrow classifications and simplistic theories of change, advocating instead for development practices that meaningfully engage with the diverse and complex realities of labour in conflict-affected settings such as Sudan.

1.3.6 Scope of Analysis: Multi-Level Investigation of Labour Dynamics

This thesis employs a multi-level analytical approach to examine the layered forces shaping labour dynamics in North Kordofan, addressing interactions across individual, societal, and institutional levels. At the family level, the analysis delves into intra-family dynamics to reveal how kinship networks both enable access to labour opportunities and reinforce patriarchal dominance (Bourdieu 2001), highlighting the spatial and time-use dimensions of social reproductive labour at the heart of 'everyday work' (Elias and Rai 2019). This lens captures the interplay of gender and power within households, where control over work opportunities often rests with male family members, limiting the agency of women and younger family members. Through this perspective, the study explores how family-based hierarchies are not only facilitators but also gatekeepers within labour regimes (Mezzadri et al. 2022a).

At the societal level, this analysis investigates social memberships that influence access to specific job types, revealing entrenched disparities across social and ethnic lines, particularly within government and wage labour roles (Wells 1996). Everyday labour relations are examined to illuminate how patterns of exploitation contribute to enduring forms of structural violence (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b) where economic and social divisions are maintained through systematic exclusion. Finally, at the institutional level, the thesis assesses how donor agencies and development organisations interact with Sudanese state actors. Rather than dismantling existing hierarchies, these institutions often reinforce them

through programmes and funding practices that prioritise formal relationships with the state, thereby indirectly supporting inequality. By integrating these three levels, the thesis offers a comprehensive picture of how Islamic ideologies, patriarchal norms, and political allegiances work together to shape Sudan's labour landscape, underpinning social hierarchies.

1.3.7 Historical and Geographic Context

This thesis situates the labour regimes in North Kordofan within Sudan's broader socio-political trajectory, tracing influences from pharaonic, medieval, feudal, colonial, and recent post-revolutionary periods. By embedding these historical layers, the analysis uncovers how systems of classification and control have persisted (Ḥasan 1973; O'Fahey and Spaulding 1974; Sikainga 1996), shaping labour regimes and social divisions in contemporary Sudan. A particular emphasis is placed on the transformative rule of President Omar El-Bashir and the National Congress Party (NCP), whose 1989–2019 military dictatorship politicised Islamisation and Arabisation policies. These strategies served as tools for consolidating power, were often enforced violently, and promoted a framework of social inclusion that favoured specific groups while marginalising others based on ethnicity, religion, and gender (Idris 2012; Jok 2007).

El-Bashir's policies have had lasting effects on labour relations and access, with exclusionary practices shaping who can access formal employment, education, and development resources (Breidlid 2013; Hassan and Kodouda 2019). This historical analysis underscores how labour regimes are controlled through sustained hierarchies that continue to dictate labour access, valuation, and categorisation in Sudan. The 'control' aspect of labour regimes (Jonas 2009) emerges as a defining characteristic, influenced by both the geographic isolation of regions like North Kordofan and the targeted policies of Khartoum elites. Through this historical and spatial lens, the thesis highlights how these longstanding social and political structures remain central to understanding labour dynamics and social inequalities in rural Sudan today.

1.4 Relevance and Importance

This thesis began with a question about the assumed link between violence and 'unemployment' and evolved into an exploration of the intricate, often hidden, connections between work and labour, on one hand, and various forms of violence, coercion, and force, on the other, and the connection between the two. By approaching labour through an expanded framework that considers structural, cultural, and symbolic violence, this research seeks to reveal how these layers of violence intersect with employment, categorisation, and social hierarchy. This nuanced view not only underscores the complex relationships between labour and violence but also provides a richer foundation for understanding how labour is both shaped by and perpetuates persistent inequalities within conflict-affected rural settings such as North Kordofan, Sudan.

1.4.1 Categorical Violence and Labour Regimes

With its focus on Sudan's rural labour regimes, this thesis hopes to offer timely contributions to studies on violence, labour and work, the connections between them, and on development for peace. Traditional peacebuilding and employment strategies often hinge on simplified assumptions that vocational training directly leads to employment, which in turn reduces poverty and fosters peace. This research challenges these assumptions, highlighting instead the interwoven, complex forms of violence that both shape and are shaped by labour structures (Cramer 2006b, 2015). Through the concept of 'categorical violence', the thesis highlights how classifications based on race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-political standing do more than restrict employment opportunities; they sustain entrenched inequalities, perpetuating both visible and invisible forms of violence.

By grounding the analysis in North Kordofan, this study provides critical insight into rural labour regimes and their socio-political dynamics, subjects which are rarely examined in conflict-affected settings. It shows how labour regimes, through classification systems (Foucault 2001; Tilly 1999) and access mechanisms (Abosag and Ghauri 2022; Mann 2014; Peluso and Ribot 2003), mediate social hierarchies and support structural and symbolic forms of violence, challenging development organisations and policymakers to rethink peacebuilding interventions. Rather than focusing solely on economic incentives, this

research argues for approaches that consider the broader historical and socio-political realities shaping labour and violence dynamics, contributing to a more impactful framework for sustainable development and peace in conflict-affected developing country contexts.

1.4.2 Contributions to Labour Studies and Socio-Political and Historical Analysis

This thesis underscores the importance of recognising how social classifications, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and religion, fundamentally shape access to and the valuation of work. The selective application of human capital theory and macroeconomic frameworks often emphasises wage metrics or productivity, overlooking the socio-political dynamics and historical structures that classify and define labour in rural settings (Fine 1998; Lerche 2022). By examining how institutions such as family, state, and citizenship intersect to shape labour regimes—and specifically access to jobs—in North Kordofan, this thesis broadens the analytical scope of labour studies. It makes visible both explicit pathways to employment and the less visible, unpaid roles such as social reproductive labour, which, often overlooked, constrain women's access to wage labour and sustain socio-economic hierarchies (Fraser 2000).

The concept of categorical violence further builds on frameworks of classification and inequality, expanding their application to conflict-affected rural settings. Categorical violence illustrates that classifications are not neutral labels but mechanisms that confine individuals to restrictive social roles, reinforcing societal hierarchies through exclusion and symbolic devaluation (Tilly 1999). By situating labour within this framework, the thesis highlights how socio-political stratifications—embedded within labour categories—directly impact access to economic opportunities, particularly for marginalised groups, such as women whose responsibilities in social reproductive labour often limit their access to wage labour. These hidden hierarchies perpetuate violence by continually reinforcing exclusion and devaluation, which restricts these groups' agency and reinforces existing inequalities.

1.4.3 Implications for Development Practice and Peacebuilding

This research provides a critical framework for evaluating international peacebuilding interventions that focus on employment generation through vocational training as a means to reduce poverty—and ultimately, peace. Many donor agencies base their programmes on theories assuming a direct link between vocational training, employment, and stability (Ralston, 2014; Blattman & Annan, 2015). These interventions, focusing primarily on individual economic incentives, often overlook the socio-political complexities embedded within conflict settings (Cramer 2015). By highlighting the limitations of skills-based peacebuilding models, this thesis argues that VT/EG initiatives, which rely on oversimplified national data and supply-side approaches, risk perpetuating inequality by neglecting the structural and demand-side issues rooted in Sudan’s entrenched social hierarchies.

Viewing these development approaches through the lens of categorical violence, the study critiques international peacebuilders’ continued reliance on assumed logics, despite growing evidence supporting a more nuanced understanding. Their inflexible adherence reflects an exercise of power, where those with influence dictate acceptable frameworks and solutions (Foucault 1973). Development agencies thus frame their interventions around visible, economically oriented linkages, yet fail to adapt their approach, reinforcing predefined norms rather than questioning or refining them.

From this perspective, the study also critiques the institutional reliance on partnerships with Sudan’s Islamist government—a relationship that allows development agencies to maintain a foothold in the country but also permits political interests to influence access to VT/EG programmes. Drawing on concepts of institutional blindness (Ferguson, 1999; Mosse, 2004), this analysis reveals that, rather than mitigating violence, uncritical partnerships and narrowly designed interventions may instead reinforce existing power asymmetries, further deepening socio-economic divides within already marginalised communities.

1.4.4 Broader Theoretical Implications

The introduction of categorical violence in this thesis provides a novel framework for analysing the nexus of violence, work, and labour, challenging the traditionally linear assumptions that link training, employment, and peace. This framework reveals how diverse

forms of violence—structural, symbolic, and everyday (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004; Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969a; Scheper-Hughes 1992)—are embedded within labour practices and classifications (Tilly 1999), expanding the concept of violence to include labour-based harms that uphold social hierarchies (Baglioni, Campling, Coe, et al. 2022; Jonas 1996). Categorical violence critiques not only the outcomes of marginalisation but also the act of classification itself, arguing that categorisation is inherently political and power-based (Foucault 2001). This critique reveals how selective economic interpretations of violence have come to dominate peacebuilding policy, often overshadowing richer socio-historical perspectives and the complexity of local social realities (Autesserre 2014). By imposing reductive frameworks that exclude alternative understandings, this dominance constitutes a form of epistemic violence, reinforcing a narrow worldview while marginalising other forms of knowledge and lived experience.

Through an examination of how social groups access employment via diverse institutions and socio-political networks, the thesis also reveals how dominant economic perspectives reinforce existing power structures. Treating unequal access to labour as a form of violence, it shows how exclusion from labour participation and unrecognition of certain forms of labour sustain and regenerate socio-political marginalisation. This analysis critiques the processes by which dominant classifications are established and institutionalised, positioning the prioritisation of economic explanations as a form of violence that oversimplifies and distorts complex social realities. Ultimately, the concept of categorical violence challenges policymakers to recognise and address the socio-political and historical conditions that shape the institutional dynamics of peacebuilding initiatives, offering a framework that illuminates the interplay between labour-based marginalisation, social exclusion, and institutional blindness on the side of policymakers (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004).

1.4.5 Policy Relevance

The findings of this research have implications for policymakers involved in labour, employment, and peacebuilding interventions within conflict-affected developing regions. By exposing the socio-political and historical contexts that shape labour classification,

valuation, and access, this study challenges conventional understandings that may overlook the nuanced realities of work and employment. The study's approach—employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, with a particular focus on labour life history (Sender and Cramer 2022)—provides a more nuanced understanding of labour that can enhance the accuracy and relevance of official classifications. These insights are applicable not only within Sudan but also to other policy contexts where labour data is often used uncritically, potentially masking inequalities.

This research also contributes to the framing of development interventions in communities and countries affected by violence. By illuminating the relationships between labour and multiple, often invisible forms of violence, it highlights that 'post-conflict' settings may still harbour complex layers of non-physical violence that can readily trigger visible conflict (Cramer 2015). This study addresses these deeper dimensions of violence and broadens the understanding of violence beyond overt conflict. By considering the role of international and national development actors within this framework of violence, the research underscores the importance of critical self-reflection among development practitioners (Geertz 1972) and situating oneself within local contexts (Mwambari 2019). This perspective aims to encourage coordinated, context-sensitive approaches that better address the needs of marginalised communities.

1.5 Research Question and Methods

This study examines Sudan's rural labour regimes through the lens of categorical violence, a concept that explores how classifications—far from being neutral or purely administrative—embed power-based exclusions, determining access to labour opportunities and perpetuating various forms of violence. Focusing on the rural town of El-Rahad in North Kordofan, the research investigates how work is conceptualised, classified, organised, and accessed across different social groups within Sudan's evolving political economy. By employing categorical violence as an analytical tool, this research identifies labour-related harm, exploitation, and the mechanisms that sustain and reproduce both visible and invisible forms of violence within labour regimes.

The research also interrogates the policy frameworks underpinning work in Sudan, first by critically analysing the national labour force survey to assess its alignment with the realities of Sudanese work and labour dynamics, and second by examining vocational training for employment generation (VT/EG) projects intended to foster peace. This study questions whether vocational training genuinely generates employment and reduces violence as intended, recognising that these interventions may overlook the socio-political structures that perpetuate violence and marginalisation.

The central research question is as follows:

How are labour market and labour regime dynamics implicated in maintaining and regenerating violence?

Framed by the concept of categorical violence, this research captures the nuanced, often invisible intersections between labour, social hierarchy, and violence. Categorical violence serves as an analytical lens, revealing how the act of classification within labour regimes is inherently power-based and sustains exclusions that marginalise certain groups while privileging others. Guided by this framework, the research combines quantitative and qualitative methods to address gaps in official labour data, which are often skewed by classifications that do not reflect local complexities and contexts.

The mixed-methods approach in this research facilitates a comprehensive understanding of labour classifications and access. A survey was conducted using a questionnaire designed specifically to avoid the limitations of policy-driven categories, following the approach advocated by Bakewell (2008), who distinguishes between standardised categories and the fluid, lived experiences of individuals. The questionnaire was adapted from the Fair Trade, Employment, and Poverty Reduction (FTEPR) project questionnaire, initially developed for rural Ethiopia and Uganda (Cramer et al. 2017). To ensure both relevance and accessibility, country-specific Arabic vocabulary from Sudan's Labour Force Survey (MoHRDL 2014) was incorporated alongside region-specific terms from Kordofan Arabic dialects.

The sampling strategies were also designed to reach individuals traditionally overlooked by official data (Muhib et al. 2001). Venue-based variation and snowball sampling techniques (Abbott and McKinney 2012) enabled access to diverse groups across El-Rahad, targeting venues linked to specific social and occupational groups and utilising community networks

for further outreach. These methods were especially effective in engaging individuals involved in types of work that official labour surveys typically neglect. The evolving security situation during the Sudanese Revolution necessitated a shift from a contrastive to a variations-based case study design, prioritising flexibility and adaptability to the unique local conditions and risks.

A total of 354 individuals across three locations were interviewed in person for data collection: 216 in El-Rahad, the main fieldwork site. As a supplementary measure, data collection also included individuals interviewed during the preliminary fieldwork, as well as those interviewed in El-Obeid and Bahri/Khartoum North while awaiting research and access permissions and interviewing policymakers and aid workers. Specifically, 48 participants were interviewed in El-Obeid and 86 in Bahri/Khartoum North:¹ the inclusion of these two locations was due in part to the security constraints limiting access to El-Rahad. Additional perspectives were gathered through interviews with two Sudanese individuals living in Oman, as well as two individuals in El-Nahoud, West Kordofan, during the site selection phase of fieldwork.

1.6 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is framed throughout by the concept of categorical violence, which serves as a foundational analytical tool for exploring the intersections between labour, social hierarchies, and violence.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. It begins with a critique of peacebuilding initiatives focused on employment generation and vocational training, exploring their theoretical foundations within human capital, rational choice, and macroeconomic theories. The chapter challenges the assumptions within these frameworks, especially their narrow interpretations of the link between training and employment as well as between unemployment and violence from a political economy perspective. It critiques how these economic theories reduce complex

¹ Both Khartoum North and Bahri refer to the same city north of Khartoum. Going forward, I use Bahri to refer to Khartoum North and Khartoum to refer to the three cities of Greater Khartoum.

social realities to simplistic models, overlooking the socio-political and historical factors that shape labour dynamics and fuel conflict.

Building on this critique, it expands on labour regime theory and feminist political economy perspectives to reveal how labour is gendered and embedded in socio-political and historical contexts, exposing the inequalities overlooked by the dominant economic frameworks. By examining these deeper structures, the chapter highlights how labour classification and valuation reinforce systemic exclusions and maintain entrenched hierarchies. The chapter concludes by examining various forms of violence relevant as labour-based harms, and introducing categorical violence as a framework rooted in Tilly's concept of categorical inequality and Foucault's ideas on classification. This framework exposes how classification systems within labour regimes embed and perpetuate social and economic hierarchies, rendering certain groups and their labour contributions invisible or devalued. Each subsequent chapter applies this lens to analyse the dynamics of rural labour regimes in North Kordofan, exploring how classification systems, exclusionary practices, and socio-political power structures intersect to sustain inequality and limit peacebuilding interventions' effectiveness in Sudan.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed rationale and methodology for the case study that forms the core of this research. It opens with a discussion of the research and methodological challenges associated with traditional approaches that tend to rely heavily on quantitative methods and econometric data derived from large-scale national surveys, especially in conflict-affected contexts such as Sudan. The chapter then outlines the selection process for the case study location, El-Rahad in North Kordofan, where the volatile security environment and pervasive uncertainty during the Sudanese Revolution influenced both site choice and the research design. A brief historical and statistical overview of the region's labour dynamics and official labour data contextualises the case study, illustrating both its relevance and the limitations of available data.

Following this, the main research question is revisited, linking it directly to the study's mixed-methods design, which prioritises capturing variations within participants' experiences through ethnographic observation, active participation, and life histories. The chapter further details the sampling strategy, explaining the rationale for using venue-based variation and snowball sampling to engage diverse social groups within El-Rahad, while also

addressing the adaptation of the research questionnaire to better reflect the complex realities of Sudanese labour contexts. It also discusses the concept of 'household' and its adaptation within the study to account for the extended family and social networks more representative of Sudanese society. Finally, the chapter introduces the study's participants, offering a snapshot of the individuals whose insights and experiences underpin the research findings.

Chapter 4 traces the labour history of Sudan, focusing on the historical development of labour regimes in the specific context of Sudan and, particularly, North Kordofan. The chapter opens by exploring early patterns of exploitation through slavery and feudal systems, as well as social transformations driven by Egyptianisation, Arabisation, and Islamisation, from the pharaonic to the Islamic sultanate period. It examines how these historical processes influenced the conceptualisation of labour and shaped labour dynamics in Sudan. The discussion then moves into the era of militarised labour and relations during the Turko-Egyptian/Ottoman rule and the Mahdist period, examining the impacts of merchant capitalism, colonisation, and Islamic jihadism. Following this, the chapter analyses the ethnicisation of labour under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, when colonial rule reinforced racial and ethnic divisions within labour structures.

The chapter further delves into the politico-religious division of labour and capitalist transformations within rural family labour during post-independence Sudan. It examines the shifts in labour dynamics during this period, focusing on how emerging political and economic forces affected labour structures. The final section considers the era of patronage-based access to labour, radical Islamism, and economic liberalisation during President El-Bashir's rule, highlighting how these changes influenced the broader idea of labour and labour regimes in Sudan. Overall, the chapter argues that Sudan's labour structures and concepts of work are deeply embedded within its historical trajectory, and shaped by social changes (such as Arabisation and Islamisation) that have defined labour classification, market structures, and the socio-economic interplay contrary to certain theoretical economic traditions.

Chapter 5 examines the meaning and organisation of everyday work in rural North Kordofan's labour regimes through the analytical lens of categorical violence. The analysis begins by exploring how gender and generational differences shape daily time allocations

within family structures, utilising a time use survey (TUS) to examine the distinctions made between paid employment and categorically labelled 'not-work', particularly unpaid reproductive labour. Moving from the family to the community and societal levels, the chapter investigates the categorisation of everyday work—both paid and unpaid—bringing visibility to work groups typically overlooked in large-scale surveys.

The chapter focuses on occupational segregation by gender, ethnicity, and class, uncovering how women and marginalised groups are often relegated to undervalued or stigmatised roles. This segregation results in gendered wage inequalities, reinforcing multiple forms of structural and symbolic violence within these labour regimes. It further examines how notions of 'dream/good work' versus 'dirty/bad work' are constructed, showing how these classifications are tied to social identities such as gender, race, and ethnicity. These constructs are influenced by entrenched social norms around masculinity, femininity, and the racialised distribution of labour, revealing the power relations underlying labour classifications.

Throughout the chapter, the analysis underscores that classifications and definitions of work in rural North Kordofan are not neutral descriptors but are shaped by power dynamics that reinforce social hierarchies. The family emerges as a critical institution in sustaining categorical inequalities, perpetuating an unequal division and valuation of work under the guise of social roles and obligations, often framed as expressions of 'love'. By unearthing these layers of power and categorisation, the chapter provides a nuanced view of how everyday work is organised, classified, and perceived within rural North Kordofan's labour regimes, and how these classifications uphold systemic inequalities and forms of violence.

Chapter 6 examines the diverse lived experiences of accessing job opportunities in North Kordofan's rural labour regimes, focusing on the socio-political factors—family, state, and citizenship—that structure access to employment. The chapter opens by investigating intra-family intermediation through 'personalised recruitment mechanisms', exploring how gender, generation, and family social class influence job access. This section highlights how family members support each other in job searches but also reveals the power dynamics that privilege specific members, reinforcing hierarchical roles within the family. The chapter then turns to individuals' experiences with the state's employment system, analysing how *wasta* (personal intermediation) and 'local activity structures' shape the demand side of

labour markets. Drawing on Burawoy's (1985) framework, this section uncovers how state-controlled hiring practices, along with local networks, influence job access. Here, job acquisition emerges as less about skills or qualifications and more about social affiliations and *wasta*.

In the final section, the concept of citizenship stratification is used to investigate how individuals' social memberships influence their access to wage labour. By identifying the least powerful worker groups and analysing their employment conditions, this analysis highlights how entrenched social hierarchies and networks shape access to work in El-Rahad. Through this exploration, Chapter 6 challenges human capital assumptions that job access is determined by individual qualifications, revealing instead that social positioning and local power dynamics are crucial. The chapter also problematises the notion of family as a unified support structure, uncovering how family dynamics can reinforce control and domination over certain members to enhance the family's socio-economic status. These insights into family, state, and social hierarchies demonstrate that rural labour regimes are not just economic structures but spaces of complex social power where access to work is mediated by longstanding social relations and power inequalities.

Chapter 7 critically examines the institutional dynamics surrounding peacebuilding initiatives centred on vocational training and employment generation (VT/EG) projects implemented in North Kordofan, exploring whether these initiatives effectively meet peacebuilding objectives. The chapter focuses on four core aspects of VT/EG programmes: data collection, project design, implementing partnerships, and target selection. Through a detailed analysis of the Sudan Labour Force Surveys (SLFS) and VT/EG projects in North Kordofan, this chapter reveals how institutional frameworks often impose rigid, external classifications and assumptions that fail to align with the realities of conflict-affected rural labour regimes in Sudan.

Throughout the chapter, the influence of both the National Congress Party (NCP) government and international donors becomes evident, particularly their limited understanding of the complex socio-political dynamics shaping these labour markets and regimes. This analysis highlights how the convergence of significant financial power and existing social hierarchies drives the personal and institutional interactions of all stakeholders involved, often prioritising the interests of powerful actors while overlooking

the needs of the most marginalised. The chapter also underscores how key donors and development agencies have consistently failed to address the needs of the vulnerable, uncritically partnering with the NCP government, disregarding the nuanced diversity of Sudan's rural labour landscape, and neglecting to methodically monitor VT/EG project implementations.

In Chapter 8, I revisit the research question, summarise the findings, and discuss the thesis' main contributions, including the concept of categorical violence as a lens for understanding labour regimes in Sudan. I reflect on the research process, noting limitations and implications for future studies, and propose recommendations for development practices that address Sudan's specific socio-political and historical context, urging a re-evaluation of conventional frameworks. Finally, I outline potential future research avenues, advocating for deeper exploration into the intersections of visibility, aid allocation, and socio-political hierarchies in conflict-affected settings such as Sudan.

Chapter 2 Categorical Violence: Labour, Conflict, and Development in Sudanese Rural Labour Regimes

2.1 Introduction

This thesis emerged from a sense of puzzlement, viewed through the lens of a development practitioner who has specialised in conflict recovery programming, including in Sudan, which is the focus of this research. Most, if not all, conflict recovery interventions rely heavily on vocational or skills training projects aimed at employment generation, with the overarching goals of fostering economic development and peacebuilding in conflict-affected developing nations (Blattman and Annan 2015; Brück et al. 2021; Izzi 2020; Ralston 2014; Walton 2010). The core premise behind these interventions is that conflict is a function of poverty, which is largely associated with unemployment (Beehner 2007; Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Collier and Sambanis 2002; Heinsohn 2003, 2017; Hendrixson 2003; Urdal 2004). Collier (2009:118) argues that peace can be achieved by training young men in basic skills, arguing that “if unskilled young men can be employed, they are less likely to be recruited into violence” (2009:102). This reinforces the widely accepted notion that providing skills leads to employment, reduces poverty, and mitigates the risk of conflict. However, this thesis questions the simplicity of this relationship by highlighting both the empirical limitations of this claim and the nuanced complexities that have emerged in recent research. Studies show that such interventions often fail to deliver the anticipated peacebuilding benefits (Blattman and Annan 2015; Brück et al. 2021; Izzi 2020; van der Veen and Datzberger 2022). Moreover, the ‘development community’ has been slow to acknowledge growing evidence that the relationship between unemployment and violence is far more complex than initially assumed (Berman et al. 2011; Cramer 2010, 2015; Enria 2018; Gutiérrez-Sanín 2008; Paasonen 2024). This tension between policy expectations and evolving evidence is the core puzzle that motivated this research.

While many post-conflict policies assume a link between unemployment and violence, the central focus of this research is the unpacking of the specific economic ideas driving these interventions. In particular, it challenges the selective application of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and Say’s Law (1834) in shaping international development and

peacebuilding efforts. These neo-classical economics concepts underpin the belief that increasing employability through skills training reduces violence by increasing the opportunity cost of participating in conflict. However, by focusing narrowly on economic incentives and individual rationality, these policies overlook the socio-political and structural factors that fuel violence. This research critiques these misapplications of neo-classical economics and demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive understanding of labour dynamics and violence in post-conflict settings.

In exploring this tension between development policy, theory, and evidence, this research expanded into a broader investigation of the social meanings and organisation of work and labour in Sudan, within the context of the country's evolving political economy.

Circumstances also intervened—in the form of patterns of insecurity and the Covid-19 pandemic—to shape the primary research into the form it eventually took. This chapter presents the main theoretical frameworks and debates guiding this research, specifically economic approaches to violence drawn from human capital theory, rational choice theory, and neo-classical macroeconomics theory on labour markets that inform international peacebuilding interventions. In addition, I draw on broader political economy of ‘labour markets’, labour regime analysis, feminist political economy and sociological and anthropological perspectives on power, inequality, and violence.

The initial questioning of the relationship between violence and unemployment led to a deeper exploration of the complex links between work, labour, and employment/unemployment, as well as overlapping forms of violence, coercion, and force. Following Vigh (2011), this thesis conceptualises violence as both visible and embedded in social structures of deprivation and instability, extending beyond physical acts to include limitations on individuals’ capacity to act, particularly in contexts of illegitimate or unjust restrictions (Riches 1986). Violence, therefore, encompasses bodily, psychological, and social harm, operating at multiple levels—interpersonal, structural (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b; Scheper-Hughes 1992), cultural (Galtung 1990), and symbolic (Bourdieu 2001; Rose 2021). By examining these forms of violence, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature on violence, work, and labour, and the intricate connections between them.

In examining these relationships through theoretical frameworks, primary research in Sudan, and broader evidence, it became evident that contested issues of classification are

crucial to their understanding. This chapter discusses the distinctions between work, labour, and employment/unemployment, and how international databases and much of the research informed by them rely on coding rules that reflect experiences in advanced industrialised capitalist economies. These frameworks do not map neatly onto the realities of low-income countries such as Sudan, where the dynamics of labour and employment are fundamentally different. Furthermore, definitional and coding challenges in research on violence further complicate our understanding of these issues, and this thesis explores these challenges in detail.

Categories are not merely analytical or statistical artefacts; they are lived realities embedded in social structures. As Vigh (2011) writes, violence can be both visible and invisible, and categories can exert violence by constraining agency, distorting understanding, restricting lives (e.g., restricting the freedoms of women), and even helping reproduce direct physical violence (e.g., by one ‘group’ versus another). How what this thesis calls ‘categorical violence’—the harm caused when classifications reduce individuals to fixed, static identities, stripping away their complexity and potential for becoming (Hustvedt 2024)—is shaped by history and the evolution of capitalism within Sudan is indeed one of the main original contributions the thesis proposes to make. In doing so, it draws on literature on classification, with particular reference to Foucault (1973) and to Tilly’s (1999) seminal work on ‘categorical inequality’ and the mechanisms—chief among them exploitation—that sustain it.

2.2 Peace through Employment Programmes?

In the early 2000s, employment became central to the peace and conflict discourse, gaining significant traction within major international peacekeeping and development organisations. The United Nations (2009:3) declared that “employment and income generation are fundamental elements of the post-conflict solution”, advocating for initiatives that would enable individuals and communities to recover and sustain themselves through stable employment. The World Bank followed a similar line. Its 2011 *World Development Report: Conflict, Security, and Development* identified unemployment as a primary driver of youth involvement in criminal groups and armed forces, advocating for

“security, justice, and jobs” as vital to breaking cycles of violence. This section provides an overview of how organisations like the World Bank and the United Nations have integrated employment into their peacebuilding strategies, setting the stage for a critical analysis of the underlying assumptions and the effectiveness of these policies.

In subsequent years, the World Bank continued this focus on jobs in peacebuilding, highlighting job creation through vocational training and life skills development in its 2013 *World Development Report* as crucial to social cohesion and stabilisation. The International Labour Organization (2011) also stressed that youth unemployment was a major catalyst for “rebellion” during the Arab Spring, noting the worsening trend due to the 2008 global financial and economic crisis and, in 2012, the ILO issued a “call for action” on the “youth employment crisis”, warning of severe social and economic consequences of inaction.

In response, governments and international agencies swiftly incorporated employment generation into post-conflict peacebuilding efforts (Holmes et al. 2013; Ralston 2014). In Sudan, donors, including Germany (GIZ 2015a, 2016, 2018), Japan (JICA 2010a; JICA, SSC, and ESS 2014), the United States (USAID 2018), and the European Union (2016), funded vocational training and employment initiatives aimed at peacebuilding, particularly in rural areas where armed conflict and instability were reported as more pronounced (Kirui et al. 2024). Peacekeeping operations, such as the United Nations Mission in Sudan (Nichols 2011; UNMIS 2010) and United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur (2013, 2015), included vocational training in their Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. International agencies (UNDP (2010, 2020) and joint UNDP-UNHCR initiatives (2014)) also targeted ‘high-risk’ youth through vocational training, assuming that peaceful employment would deter them from engaging in violence.

However, the effectiveness of job creation programmes in promoting peace remains debated. Izzi (2020:IV) notes that while youth employment programmes have become a common feature of post-conflict strategies, evidence supporting their impact on peacebuilding is “mixed at best”. Blattman and Annan (2015) similarly argue that rigorous evidence linking peaceful work opportunities to reductions in crime and violence is scarce, and the impact of training—especially when unaccompanied by capital—appears minimal. Recent studies further challenge the presumed connection between training and

employment (Bratti et al. 2022; Card, Kluve, and Weber 2015; McGrath et al. 2020), as well as between unemployment and violence (Cramer 2015; Enria 2018; Izzi 2020).

Brück et al. (2021) calculate that although over USD 10 billion was invested in employment programmes during the 2010s with the goal of contributing to peace, they found limited evidence that it significantly impacted peace outcomes. They identified a persistent tendency to assume that such programmes contributed to peacebuilding, despite a lack of concrete evidence—a “major challenge for justifying continued spending on jobs-for-peace programmes”. This limited impact is partly attributed to the failure to address the underlying socio-political dynamics that shape labour market outcomes and contribute to violence. These findings reveal that the relationship between employment and peacebuilding is complex, nuanced, and context-specific, with broader structural factors playing a critical role in sustaining conflict and limiting the effectiveness of employment-focused solutions.

2.3 Economic Theories of War and Violence

International development interventions in post-conflict settings often assume a direct link between unemployment and violence. The ‘theory of change’ underpinning these programmes is that reducing unemployment through vocational training and skills development will lead to reductions in violence. This theory and the ideas informing it draw from three interrelated economic ideas: human capital theory, rational choice theory, and neo-classical macroeconomic views. Human capital theory posits that investing in education and skills increases employability, leading to better economic opportunities. Rational choice theory suggests individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis—if stable employment is available, the opportunity cost of engaging in violence rises, making violence less attractive. Neo-classical macroeconomic theory views unemployment as determined by the balance of supply and demand within the labour market, implying that a mismatch between the labour supply and the labour demand would result in unemployment. In this context, Say’s Law (1834), specifically in its human capital version, suggests that increasing the supply of trained workers will naturally generate its own demand, leading to employment. This perspective is also applied to the ‘choice’ of violence, drawing from the

fundamental axioms of neo-classical economics: methodological individualism, means-to-ends rationality, and utility maximisation. As Backhouse (2010:15) puts it: "Economic theory typically involves the working out of the implications of rational choice in a variety of contexts". This illustrates how rational choice theory's influence extends across economic policies, including interventions in post-conflict settings, yet often oversimplifies the complexities of violence and labour market dynamics.

One of the foundational elements of neo-classical economics, methodological individualism, has its roots in the marginal revolution, particularly in the works of Jevons (1871) and Edgeworth (1881). Both argue that social phenomena could be understood through the aggregation of individual decisions, where rational actors seek to maximise their utility. This principle suggests that social behaviour results from individuals making choices within economic constraints, with preferences considered stable and unchanging (Stigler and Becker 1977). Rational choice theory, a direct application of methodological individualism, serves as an analytical framework to interpret decision-making processes. Economists like Smith (1805), Becker (1964, 1968), and Buchanan and Tullock (1969) argue that individuals maximise utility by assessing the cost-benefit of their options, identifying the opportunity cost, and selecting paths that yield the greatest personal advantage. As Edgeworth (1881:16) famously stated, "the first principle of economics is that every agent is actuated only by self-interest".

From the 1970s onward, the analytical tools of neo-classical economics, with its focus on rational, utility-maximising behaviour, expanded to include a wide range of social phenomena beyond markets—such as crime, family, and marriage (Becker 1968, 1978), evolutionary theory, settlement, and conflict (Hirshleifer 1987, 1991, 1994), and insurrections (Grossman 1991). Becker (1978:5) asserted that "combined assumptions of maximising behaviour, market equilibrium, and stable preferences form the heart of the economic approach". This expansion into non-economic areas is part of a broader academic movement often referred to as economic imperialism (Fine 2000a; Zafirovski 2000), reflecting the growing influence of economic methodologies in traditionally non-economic fields. This reshaping of disciplines such as sociology and political science (Medema 1997) has profound implications. Applied to the context of violence, this theoretical approach suggests that individuals engage in violent acts when the perceived benefits, such as

economic gains or political power, significantly outweigh the potential risks or costs (see Hirshleifer (1994)).

According to human capital and rational choice theorists, such as Becker (1964) and Mincer (1974), individuals are comparable to physical capital in that they generate economic returns based on their levels of investment in education and training. From this perspective, unemployment—and the potential resultant poverty—is frequently viewed as a consequence of inadequate investment in human capital. This viewpoint posits that individuals with insufficient training or education are less employable and thus more susceptible to economic hardships. Becker's (1964) work on rational choice theory and crime, for instance, extends this logic to violence and crime, arguing that unemployment can contribute to both, as individuals make cost-benefit calculations based on the limited economic opportunities available to them.

One of the most influential recent works on the linkage between development, conflict, and violence is Collier and Hoeffler's (1998, 2000) 'model of civil war', which originated from the World Bank project on the "Economics of Political and Criminal Violence". Collier, as Director of the Development Research Group at the World Bank, played a pivotal role in shaping this project. His work became "very influential" in policy and research concerning the relationship between conflict and development (Sambanis 2003:1), and was accepted by a "large number of donors as a major explanation of conflicts in Africa" (Mkandawire 2002:187). However, Banerjee et al. (2006) critically assessed the Bank's work on conflict, pointing to its reliance on flawed econometric models and incomplete data. Banerjee et al., well-respected economists with roots in neo-classical economic theory, argued that the Bank's research, particularly Collier and Hoeffler's model, oversimplified the causes of civil wars by focusing too narrowly on economic factors such as unemployment and poverty. The evaluation further highlighted the neglect of socio-political and historical dynamics, such as governance issues and ethnic grievances, which are crucial to understanding the complexities of conflict.

Despite these critiques, Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) model remains influential in arguing that the surge in civil wars in Africa can be largely attributed to poor economic performance, including negative growth rates, low income levels, and reliance on primary commodity exports. According to their model, poverty, exacerbated by unemployment, drives

economically disadvantaged young men to make 'rational choices' that lead them to engage in criminal activities or civil wars. The marginal payoff of violent activities relative to non-violent efforts is greater at lower income levels. They specifically use male secondary school enrolment as a proxy for economic opportunities, noting that it "has the advantage of being focused on young males—the group from whom rebels are recruited" (Collier and Hoeffler 2004:569). They argue that low education and earnings reduce the opportunity cost of rebellion, facilitating conflict, as "low foregone earnings facilitate conflict" (ibid: 588). In pre-war labour markets, potential rebels conduct a cost-benefit analysis to assess the advantages of joining a rebellion. For unemployed individuals with limited education and facing financial difficulties, the opportunity cost of joining a rebellion is relatively low, thus rationalising their propensity to join rebel forces, particularly if material rewards are available.

In the economic frameworks developed by Collier and his team, post-conflict economies are often depicted as highly dysfunctional and impoverished, suffering from a continuous decline in fiscal health due to shrinking tax revenues, escalating military expenditures, debt, and inflation. Peace in these post-conflict societies, particularly in rural areas of less developed countries, is perceived as inherently precarious and vulnerable. Collier and Sambanis (2002) argue that approximately 40% of post-conflict societies relapse into violent conflict, a phenomenon they term the 'conflict trap'. This concept has become a central theoretical framework for international development policymakers to justify interventions in conflict-affected developing countries (World Bank 2003, 2011). Rural areas, often assumed to be associated with higher levels of violence due to weak governance, economic marginalisation, and resource competition (Collier and Hoeffler 2005; Kaldor 2012), are frequently targeted by such interventions, which focus on generating employment to address these perceived grievances. The World Bank (2003) published *Breaking the Conflict Trap*, authored by Collier's team, which introduced this concept. The concept has also been adopted by other international organisations, including the United Nations (2009), which collaborates with ILO, UNDP, and other agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, and UNRWA, to guide interventions in rural post-conflict settings, where unemployment and violence are seen as closely linked.

In addition, the 'youth bulge' theory, which complements the conflict trap framework suggests that countries with a large proportion of young men in their population face increased risks of instability and conflict. This demographic trend intensifies competition for scarce economic resources, elevating unemployment and fostering conditions conducive to violence (Beehner 2007; Heinsohn 2008; Urdal 2004). The correlation between youth demographics and violence further reinforces the emphasis on economic recovery and job creation in international peacebuilding strategies.²

Following this entrenched view of conflict, as described by the World Bank (2003), there emerged a strong consensus on the necessity of economic recovery and growth to counter the risks posed by the 'conflict trap' and sustain peace. According to Collier et al. (2003), economic growth is not just beneficial but crucial, serving as a cornerstone of liberal peacebuilding strategies that advocate for democratisation and market-oriented reforms (Howard 2000; Ottaway and Lacina 2003). These strategies emphasise the role of economic development in stabilising war-torn societies by focusing on employment and job creation, particularly for young men who are often seen as the most likely to engage in insurgency due to perceived grievances and economic desperation. This view suggests that targeted employment generation is critical not only for economic development but also for post-conflict recovery, as highlighted by researchers such as Addison and Murshed (2005) and Ali and Elbadawi (2005). The emphasis is that vocational training will equip less-educated individuals, especially young men, to be prepared for market needs and get employment.

This dominance of a particular kind of economic perspective in the study of conflict and violence has profound implications, often downplaying the importance of social dimensions. For instance, the reliance on statistical indicators such as educational attainment—as used by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) in their analysis of civil wars—has been criticised for its narrow focus on quantifiable variables. In their framework, higher rates of male secondary

² The 'youth bulge' theory draws from Malthusian ideas on population dynamics (Malthus 1914) and relative deprivation theory (Gurr 1970, 1993; Merton 1938), which suggests that perceived disparities can lead to social unrest. It argues that a high proportion of young men in a population exacerbates competition for scarce resources, particularly jobs, thus increasing the risk of violence (Beehner 2007; Heinsohn 2003, 2017; Hendrixson 2003, 2004; Urdal 2004). Studies by Cincotta, Engelman, and Anastasion (2003) and Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner (2009) have shown a correlation between demographic trends and violence, affirming the significant impact of youth demographics on national stability.

schooling were shown to reduce the risk of civil conflict, based on the assumption that education translates directly into improved employment opportunities and reduced economic incentives for rebellion. However, this approach oversimplifies the complex relationship between education, employment, and violence. While schooling may indeed influence economic outcomes, it is far from the sole determinant of employment prospects, particularly in regions where informal economies, social relations, and patronage networks play a significant role in shaping labour market dynamics (Ferguson 1999).

Following the discussion on how economic imperialism has shaped the analysis of conflict, it becomes evident that this influence extends directly to the understanding of violence within these frameworks. Neo-classical economic approaches tend to emphasise more readily observable, measurable forms of violence, particularly those that can be quantified, such as direct physical violence (Duffield 2001a; Strange 1988). This reliance on quantitative analysis, combined with economic determinism, shapes the way these approaches interpret conflict. By reducing the causes (or correlates) of conflict and violence primarily to economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, and employing econometric models to predict conflict based on these variables, these theorists inherently focus on physical violence—such as deaths and battles—that are more commonly measured. While quantitative analysis could also capture other forms of violence through surveys and more diverse data sources, these are less frequently used, leading to a focus on what is most easily quantifiable.

Collier and Hoeffler, for instance, use the statistics of civil war as the primary form of violence in their economic modelling. Their definition of civil war includes conflicts with at least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year, a key threshold commonly used to distinguish 'war' or 'major armed conflict'. This criterion is based on the Correlates of War (COW) project, initiated at the University of Michigan, and has been widely employed in conflict research. However, civil war is not solely defined by this battle-death threshold; it also requires that the conflict occurs within a single country, between organised groups, and involves competition for control over the state or secession. Definitions of civil war vary across scholars and datasets. For example, Sambanis (2004) highlights how definitions can depend on factors such as duration and the organisational structures of the groups involved, while the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) includes additional criteria to capture a broader range of conflict dynamics, such as non-state actors and lower-intensity conflicts. In

their research from 1992 to 1999, Collier and Hoeffler used datasets from Singer and Small (1994; 1982), which form the foundation of the COW project. While this definition is widely used, it has been refined by datasets like UCDP, which aim to capture a more comprehensive picture of armed conflicts, including civil wars.

Moreover, while databases like those developed by the UCDP have advanced our understanding of armed conflicts (Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015; Wallensteen and Sollenberg 2001) and organised violence (Pettersson, Höglbladh, and Öberg 2019), they often compartmentalise armed conflicts from myriad other pervasive forms of violence occurring globally. This separation reflects a broader division in research domains: while significant progress has been made in the study of armed conflict and development (Afshar and Eade 2004; IISS 2006; Mac Ginty and Williams 2009), there has been limited engagement with literature on other manifestations of violence, such as intimate partner violence (Burns et al. 2020; Devries et al. 2013) or forms of structural violence (Farmer 1996, 2004) or symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), which will be discussed more in detail in Section 2.6.

The tendency to emphasise physical violence while neglecting other, sometimes invisible, forms of violence is also evident in most post-conflict recovery programmes, such as DDR initiatives. According to the UN's (2020) Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), DDR typically begins after a ceasefire or peace agreement has been established. While it may be operationally appropriate for DDR efforts to wait for such moments to disarm and demobilise combatants, the assumption that these moments mark an end to all forms of violence is problematic.

Critiques of 'liberal peacebuilding' approaches highlight how international peacebuilding initiatives, including DDR, adopt a limited view of peace and violence. They focus primarily on the cessation of physical violence—such as armed conflict—while failing to adequately address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that continue to perpetuate cycles of violence and instability. Richmond (2011) critiques the narrow focus of peacebuilding programmes, including DDR, which often prioritise state security and formal peace processes over the deeper social and political transformations necessary for sustainable peace. Mac Ginty (2011) similarly argues that these interventions may fail to align with local needs and conditions, emphasising the cessation of violence without

incorporating locally relevant definitions of peace. Autesserre (2014) explores how international peacebuilding efforts often fail to effectively engage with local communities, focusing instead on visible indicators of peace, such as the absence of war, rather than addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

In sum, the economic theories of violence that underpin international development interventions in post-conflict settings—drawing selectively on elements of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and neo-classical macroeconomic perspectives—focus primarily on economic causes of particular forms of violence and propose economics-based solutions. These frameworks emphasise the visible, quantifiable manifestations of violence and economic factors, such as unemployment and poverty, often overlooking the deeper social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate cycles of conflict. This narrow approach is mirrored in international peacebuilding initiatives, which tend to prioritise vocational training, formal employment creation, and state security over transformative social change. Moving forward, a political economy approach offers a more comprehensive framework to understand the relationship between unemployment and violence, recognising the significance of broader socio-political dynamics that influence both conflict and peace.

2.4 Political Economy on the Link between Unemployment and Violence

Building on the critique of the selective application of human capital and rational choice theories and the neo-classical macroeconomic view of labour market dynamics to explain employment and violence presented in the previous section, this section explores an alternative perspective—a political economy perspective—on the link between unemployment and violence. This broader lens is supplemented by social anthropology perspectives, emphasising structural and socio-political dynamics that are often overlooked by neo-classical approaches. While economic theories of conflict tend to reduce violence to matters of utility maximisation and economic incentives, political economy perspectives provide a more nuanced understanding of the historical, political, and social forces contributing to conflict. Rather than viewing unemployment as a direct cause of violence,

these perspectives consider the broader socio-political conditions and grievances that shape individuals' decisions and experiences within conflict settings.

In line with this broader critique, an exploration of the theoretical foundations that guide international post-conflict recovery efforts—particularly those focused on vocational training as a pathway to employment generation and peacebuilding—reveals key assumptions drawn from neo-classical economic approaches. These assumptions reflect the reductionist tendencies of many applications of rational choice and human capital theories, which have been criticised for economic determinism and a narrow focus on quantifiable outcomes. Cramer (2002:1845) critiques orthodox economic approaches to conflict, which gained prominence in the early 21st century, as being “reductionist, speculative, and misleading”. He highlights the tendency of rational choice theories to erode social dimensions by reducing human behaviour to simplified models of utility maximisation, neglecting context and contingency. In this vein, Cramer (2009) critiques the *Homo Economicus* model, which assumes individuals are rational agents driven by self-interest and economic incentives. He argues that this model oversimplifies the motivations behind violent actions, failing to account for socio-political and psychological complexities that influence decision-making in conflict settings. Such economic determinism overlooks the ways in which violence may serve as a means of asserting agency, addressing grievances, or responding to exclusion, rather than merely being a reaction to unemployment or economic hardship.

Cramer (2002:1854) also identifies weaknesses in the data linking educational attainment with employment, pointing to the over-reliance on years of schooling as a proxy for productivity, which human capital theory often takes for granted. McGrath et al. (2020:471) support this critique, arguing that the narrow focus on vocational education and training overlooks broader structural factors that influence productivity. Bennell (1996) has noted significant discrepancies between reported school enrolment and actual learning outcomes, a problem that is especially relevant in African contexts, where educational quality and access can vary significantly. These critiques challenge the tendency to apply theories developed in advanced economies to very different social and economic environments in conflict-affected developing countries.

Amsden (2010), meanwhile, challenges the broader assumptions of the human capital approach by arguing that its predominant focus on supply-side interventions, such as vocational training, ignores the crucial role of demand-side dynamics of labour markets. She traces this approach to “misapplication” of Say's Law (1834), which posits that supply creates its own demand. Amsden's critique highlights the fallacy of assuming that the supply of well-trained, well-nourished, and well-clothed workers will automatically create job opportunities at fair wages, a notion she terms “[j]ob dementia” (2010:60). In conflict-affected settings, where unemployment is already prevalent and the demand for skilled labour is weak, this focus on human capital development can lead to an oversupply of skilled yet unemployed workers, deepening socio-economic inequalities.

Empirical research in Africa (Bennell 1996) and the Middle East (Shafiq and Vignoles 2015) further supports the view that the relationship between education and employment is far from straightforward (Bratti et al. 2022; Card et al. 2015; McGrath et al. 2020). For instance, Shafiq and Vignoles (2015) found that in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan, lower levels of educational attainment were sometimes associated with higher employment rates, particularly in informal economies, challenging the assumption that more education directly translates to better employment outcomes. These findings reinforce the need to consider local economic contexts and labour market structures, which are often overlooked by policies grounded solely in human capital theory.

If training and education fail to yield the expected employment outcomes, how can we expect employment to significantly impact peace and violence? Blattman and Ralston (2015), in their review of employment interventions in fragile states, argue that these interventions have had minimal impact on poverty or stability, particularly when weighed against their costs. Some economists, such as Becker and Collier, drawing on basic tenets of human capital theory, have posited that lower educational attainment may increase the likelihood of engaging in violent behaviour. However, this extension of the theory overlooks important variations in educational quality and social dynamics, falsely treating all forms of schooling as equal.

This critique is further reinforced by research on DDR programmes, which aim to reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian life by providing vocational training. However, as McMullin (2013) and Muggah (2005) point out, DDR programmes often fail to address broader

structural problems of high unemployment and underdevelopment of labour markets, leading to poor long-term outcomes. In the case of South Sudan, for instance, Munive (2013) highlights the disconnect between DDR-provided skills and the local economy, which is largely informal and unable to absorb newly trained workers. Jennings (2007) similarly critiques Liberia's DDR programme for its over-reliance on formal employment, neglecting the realities of the informal economy and undermining the long-term reintegration of ex-combatants.

Moreover, the opportunity cost analysis central to human capital theory assumes that individuals make rational decisions about investing in education based primarily on potential future earning and economic benefits. However, this perspective neglects how broader socio-political factors influence educational access and outcomes. Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) highlight how gender inequalities, social hierarchies, and power structures constrain educational opportunities in developing countries, especially those affected by conflict. These structural barriers result in significant disparities in both educational quality and employment outcomes, complicating simplistic opportunity cost models. In many developing countries, educational systems face significant challenges, including inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, and curricula misaligned with local economic needs (UNESCO 2019). Social dynamics—such as gender, class, and ethnicity—play a pivotal role in shaping how education translates (or fails to translate) into economic opportunities (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Khan 2021). This complexity necessitates a more nuanced understanding of the broader socio-political determinants that influence both education and employment outcomes, especially in conflict-affected developing country settings. The issue of access, especially in the context of labour markets, will be discussed in Section 2.5.1.

As noted above, an influential strand of neoclassical economic work, rooted in rational choice axioms and drawing on human capital theory, has consistently predicted a straightforward link between employment and reduced violence. However, this idea has been increasingly challenged by empirical evidence, which suggests that the relationship between unemployment and violence is complex, contingent, and shaped by a variety of socio-political factors. Holmes et al. (2013) argue that there is little evidence to support the claim that direct employment generation or self-employment initiatives lead to increased

stability. This critique challenges the economic reductionism of prevailing peacebuilding strategies, which fail to account for the underlying social inequalities that often fuel violence.

Quantitative analyses of unemployment and violence, such as those conducted by Berman et al. (2011) in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines, challenge the conventional wisdom that unemployment is a primary driver of violence. Paasonen (2017, 2024) similarly found little empirical support for a direct link between unemployment and ‘political violence’³ in Arab countries, where employed individuals were more likely to participate in protests during the Arab Spring. These findings suggest that employment status alone is not a sufficient predictor of violent behaviour.

Research on insurgent and terrorist groups further challenges the conventional link between socio-economic status and involvement in violence. For example, Gutiérrez-Sanín's (2008) study of Colombia's FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) questions rational choice theory that links voluntary insurgent recruitment solely to impoverished, unemployed, and uneducated young men. His findings reveal that many FARC fighters were educated, employed, and earning above-average wages prior to joining the group. Furthermore, up to 40% of FARC combatants were women, questioning the notion that such movements are predominantly male (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Vargas 2017). Similar patterns are observed in terrorism studies, showing that many recruits had higher education, stable employment, and even salary increases before joining (Berrebi 2007; Gambetta and Hertog 2009; Krueger and Malečková 2003; Sageman 2004), further complicating the link between unemployment and violence.

Cramer (2015) critiques the narrow focus on job creation and economic liberalisation in peacebuilding strategies, emphasising that such approaches often fail to address the

³ While there may be debate over whether the protests that took place during the Arab Spring should be characterised as ‘political violence’, it is clear that various forms of violence influenced the dynamics surrounding the protests. DeFronzo (2007) argues that peaceful protests against regimes can evolve into violent uprisings when met with violent repression, using the Arab Spring as “a stark example of how peaceful demonstrations, when met with state repression, can escalate into violent political movements” (2007:181). Although I offer my own perspective on each instance of violence and address the contested nature of classifying violence, I retain Paasonen’s (2017) original usage of the term ‘political violence’ in reference to the Arab Spring. This choice aligns with other scholars who describe the Arab Spring as violent (Tilly 2003) and reflects the multifaceted nature of the events.

complex and context-specific nature of post-conflict labour markets. These markets are shaped by historical injustices, structural inequalities, informal economies, and the legacies of war. Cramer argues that merely creating formal jobs or liberalising markets neglects the deeper socio-economic conditions that contributed to the conflict in the first place and that persist in post-conflict recovery. Furthermore, he highlights that labour markets and labour relations are not only disrupted by conflict but can also actively contribute to violence. Entrenched inequalities and exploitative labour relations can serve as sources of grievance and fuel fresh outbreaks. For this reason, Cramer advocates for peacebuilding strategies that move beyond simple job creation to focus on transforming the structures of labour markets and addressing underlying inequalities. By tackling these deeper socio-economic issues, post-conflict recovery can become more sustainable and equitable.

Ethnographic research, especially from a social anthropology and political economy perspective, provides deeper insights into the relationship between labour, employment, and violence. Bourgois' (2003) work on Latino workers in East Harlem demonstrates how marginalisation and discrimination by white workers in low-wage jobs push Latino workers to seek alternative sources of economic security, including gang involvement. This shift is not solely driven by unemployment but by oppressive labour relations that undermine dignity and fairness. His research demonstrates that gangs offer not just income but also community and respect, which the formal labour market fails to provide.

Enria's (2018) research on youth in post-conflict Sierra Leone complements Bourgois' findings. She explores the concept of *sababu*, influential intermediaries who facilitate job access in urban labour markets. Marginalised youth often resort to collective violence to gain the loyalty of a *sababu*, expecting reciprocation in the form of employment or material benefits ("the love of a *sababu*" (Enria 2015)).⁴ These acts of political violence are rooted in socio-economic exclusion and the struggle for social inclusion, highlighting how access to labour is influenced by power dynamics rather than employment status alone. Enria's analysis questions the securitisation of unemployed youth and shows that conventional

⁴ The functioning of *wasta* and *sababu* and related institutions can be understood through the analytical framework established by Hirschman (1970) in his theory of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. Hirschman's conceptual framework aids in grasping how, within employment relations, managers or superiors create barriers to prevent easy 'exit' from the workplace or the expression of 'voice' to express dissatisfaction. This strategy inhibits both exit and voice mechanisms, which are essential for driving reforms at the workplace and beyond.

notions of unemployment fail to capture the complexity of young people's engagement with labour markets in developing countries.

Gutiérrez-Sanín (2019) discusses the role of agrarian elites in Colombia, who, as 'violence entrepreneurs', mobilised rural populations to form paramilitary groups to protect their interests. Like the *sababus*, these rural elites leverage their influence to manage and recruit violence, embedding it within social and economic structures of their communities. In this context, violence becomes a mechanism through which marginalised groups gain access to work opportunities and secure livelihoods, while elites use it to maintain control over resources. Gutiérrez-Sanín's findings underscore the role of powerful intermediaries in orchestrating violence as part of broader labour market dynamics, paralleling Enria's observations of the *sababus*.

The work of Bourgois, Enria, and Gutiérrez-Sanín underscores that violence often functions as a form of labour and survival for marginalised groups. Richards (1996) presents youth involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war as a rational response to the lack of opportunities, yet this response transcends a purely economic calculus. Youth were reacting not only to material deprivation but also to deep-seated socio-political exclusion. The war provided a space where they could reclaim a sense of agency and identity in a society that had systematically marginalised them. This analysis highlights that while economic conditions are part of the picture, broader social structures, such as dislocation and marginalisation, were equally significant in shaping youth decisions—nuances that traditional economic models often fail to capture. Duffield (2001b) similarly argues that violence is integrated into global economies, forming part of informal and alternative economies in which armed groups provide income and livelihood opportunities. Cramer (2015) extends this perspective, asserting that violent activities—whether by armed groups or militias—require skills, discipline, and organisation, thus blurring the boundaries between conventional employment and violence. For many marginalised individuals, engaging in violence is a calculated decision linked to opportunities for income, status, and compensation opportunities, rather than merely a reaction to unemployment.

In conclusion, while specific application of strands of neo-classical economics theory provides limited and overly simplistic explanations of the relationship between unemployment and violence, the political economy perspective addresses these

inadequacies by focusing on structural inequalities and socio-political factors. The complexities of post-conflict labour markets and diverse historical contexts require a broader analytical framework—one that acknowledges the influence of labour relations on both the onset of violence and post-conflict recovery. The next section will further develop these themes, with the more nuanced perspectives of labour regime theorists and feminist political economists, thus highlighting divergent understandings and their implications for policy and socio-economic equity.

2.5 Meaning and Classification of Labour and Labour Markets

2.5.1 From Labour Markets to Labour Regimes

As a part of the theories and ideas informing the ‘theory of change’ underpinning the international peacebuilding interventions, which argues that reducing unemployment through vocational training and skills development leads to reductions in violence, neo-classical macroeconomic views on labour markets rest on the notion of a singular labour market, governed by market forces. This theoretical construct originates from macroeconomic and microeconomic labour market theories. Macroeconomic theory examines the interaction among economic aggregates (investment, consumption, government spending, the trade balance) and the determinants of their levels; it focuses on aggregate supply and demand in an economy. For most orthodox macroeconomists, unemployment is really a microeconomic phenomenon, determined within the labour market (e.g., by labour market ‘rigidities’ or ‘imperfections’). However, post-Keynesian economists, such as King (2015), argue that unemployment is both a micro- and a macroeconomic phenomenon and it is largely determined not in the labour market itself but in the wider economy and the shifts in effective demand.

Human capital theory, rooted in microeconomics, extends this framework by emphasising that access to labour markets is primarily determined by individual investments in production-related factors, such as education and training. This focus on production-based investment is rooted in classical property theory, where theorists like Macpherson (1962, 1978) and Locke (1986), framed access as a ‘bundle of rights’, where individuals are viewed as possessive proprietors of their own skills, detached from societal influence. In this view,

labour market access is framed as an individual responsibility, with limited attention given to the broader social or structural factors shaping opportunities.

The concept of general equilibrium, central to orthodox economic theory, further reduces social phenomena to economic logic, reinforcing the notion that social realities are primarily understood through economic principles. This framework suggests that labour market outcomes are driven mainly by market mechanisms, such as supply and demand, rather than social or historical influences. Economists like Kuznets (1973) and Lewis (1954) conceptualised the economy as a largely self-contained system, where issues such as social inequalities or power dynamics are secondary or irrelevant to the functioning of labour markets. In this orthodox perspective, labour markets operate independently of social structures, with outcomes seen as the result of rational decision-making within competitive markets. This reductionist approach can obscure how deeply interconnected labour and social relations are, particularly in conflict-affected or economically marginalised regions, where social networks, power relations, and informal economies play a significant role in shaping labour outcomes.

Extending these ideas, Friedman's (1968) theory of the natural rate of unemployment reinforces the notion that labour markets are self-regulating. According to this theory, unemployment results naturally from factors such as friction and voluntary job searching, rather than from systemic inequalities or deficiencies in aggregate demand. Friedman's perspective assumes that market forces, rather than structural barriers, are the primary drivers of unemployment, thus minimising the role of social or historical factors in shaping labour market outcomes. However, as previously noted, King (2015) challenges this view by arguing that broader economic conditions, such as deficiencies in aggregate demand, play a critical role in shaping unemployment outside the labour market.

In light of these critiques, approaches to violence drawn from human capital and rational choice theories and neo-classical macroeconomics build on the assumption that labour market inequalities and differences in outcomes are primarily based on individual investments in their own capabilities or 'capital'. This perspective assumes that unemployment and inequalities are gradational, resulting from varying levels of production-related investments, rather than being shaped by structural or systemic factors. Consequently, inequality is interpreted as a continuum of individual merit and performance,

overlooking the deeper influence of social structures and group-based divisions (Harvey 2007). By focusing on income curves and individual productivity, these economic theories fail to account for how entrenched social categories—rather than individual investments—often dictate labour market outcomes.

However, this view of the labour market as a singular, self-regulating entity has attracted significant criticism. Fine (1998:4–5) argues that “mainstream neo-classical economics” adopts an overly simplistic view, reducing the complexities of labour markets to mere supply-and-demand interactions. Within this framework, workers are often conceptualised as atomised individuals, detached from the social relationships and structures that profoundly influence their labour market experiences.

Prasch (2003) extends this critique by focusing on the unique nature of labour itself. Unlike other commodities, labour cannot be separated from its human provider. Prasch argues that orthodox economics overlooks this critical distinction, failing to recognise that labour, as an expression of human effort, is embedded within broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. As a result, labour markets cannot be understood purely through economic mechanisms, as they are constantly shaped by societal dynamics that mainstream economic models fail to consider.

Moreover, labour markets are not homogeneous. Fine (1998:5) highlights the plural nature of labour markets, arguing that they “are different from one another, not only in outcomes in the sense of rewards in the form of wages, conditions, and careers, but also in the way in which they are structured and reproduced”. This view challenges the notion of a singular labour market, emphasising that diverse socio-political and historical forces shape different labour market experiences, making a one-size-fits-all theory inapplicable. And it goes beyond what Fine, among others (Peetz 2019), considers the limited engagement with the dimensions and determinants of heterogeneity reflected in ‘segmented labour market’ theories.

These socio-political factors also include the influence of family dynamics in determining who gains access to different types of work. Family networks have historically played a central role in providing work opportunities to their members (Granovetter 1973; Medick 1976), and this role is evident across diverse contexts. For instance, in California's

strawberry industry, Mexican farm labourers rely on their extended families both for work opportunities and for sustaining themselves during periods of unemployment (Wells 1996). Similarly in Belgium, parents' social and ethnic networks, alongside their professional affiliations, significantly shape their children's employment prospects (Verhaeghe, Li, and Van de Putte 2013). In some contexts, the influence of affluent parents in facilitating job opportunities for their children has given rise to the term 'nepo babies', referring to privileged individuals benefiting from such connections, particularly in industries like entertainment in the USA (Jones 2022) and among the executives of major British companies (Murray 2023).

While family networks can provide vital support and enhance employment opportunities, they also contribute to perpetuating inequalities. These networks often reinforce existing power structures and limit access to those who lack the necessary family connections, thereby entrenching disparities across socio-economic lines. For example, in developing countries, kin networks may facilitate access to urban labour markets, as seen in Burkina Faso, where connections with paternal uncles often play a key role in securing jobs (Thorsen 2013). However, those without such support, as seen in the case of Ghana, face significant obstacles, which adds to their marginalisation and limits their upward mobility (Langevang 2008). This phenomenon highlights how reliance on familial connections can provide significant advantages to some, while simultaneously reinforcing barriers and exclusions for others, ultimately perpetuating inequalities in labour markets.

In the literature on work in Sudan, ethnicity, family, and gender are significant factors that shape labour and labour markets. As discussed in Chapter 4, people with darker skin and certain ethnic backgrounds were often forced into slave labour (Abdelsalam 2008; Bernal 1990; Jok 2013; Sikainga 1996), highlighting the role of racial, ethnic, and family backgrounds in determining labour opportunities.

Mahmoud (1984) found that in El-Rahad, a rural town in North Kordofan and the case study of this research, commercial and industrial activities were dominated by six capitalists, most of whom are from the Jaalyin tribes, all sons of established traders. This demonstrates how labour opportunities were monopolised by a few influential families. The prioritisation of one's own family in providing employment, often excluding others based on ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations, leads to the exploitation of those outside these networks.

This also included opportunity hoarding through matrimonial alliances and family-linked business partnerships.

O'Brien's (1983, 1986) research supports this, showing how colonial irrigation projects shaped agricultural labour markets along ethnic lines. He highlights the central role of family dynamics and patriarchy in structuring women's participation, revealing the deep impact of colonial and socio-political forces on Sudanese labour markets. By positioning the family as the primary point of labour access, patriarchal norms confined women's work largely to domestic or informal roles, limiting their economic opportunities. The intersection of gender, ethnicity, and family structures not only shaped labour market participation but also reinforced male dominance, consolidating control over both family and economic life. This created a system of exploitation where women's work was undervalued and their labour marginalised. Patriarchal control over agricultural labour markets, combined with ethnic hierarchies, fostered inequalities that were perpetuated through colonial and post-colonial governance. These dynamics facilitated exploitative practices, including forced labour and the subjugation of women and ethnic minorities, reinforcing entrenched systems of dominance and control.

It therefore is crucial to recognise that labour market access is not simply a static right, as classical property theorists might suggest, but is inherently shaped by social factors and power dynamics. Bourdieu (1986) and Mandel (1971) challenge the orthodox economic view that links access solely to production-based investments, pointing out that broader social determinants play a significant role in shaping employment opportunities. Ribot and Peluso (2003:153) further refine this view, defining access as "the ability to benefit from things—including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols". By drawing on earlier research by Watts (1983), Blaikie (1985), and Berry (1988, 1993), as well as on their own empirical work on access to forests in Indonesia, Nepal, and Mozambique (Peluso 1988; Ribot 1998), they argue that access involves the ability to benefit, which extends beyond the limited notion of access as merely a granted right under classical property theory. This expanded definition highlights the socio-political forces and historical contexts that continuously shape access, making it a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon.

This broader understanding of access aligns well with the goals of this study, as it frames labour market access through two distinct yet interconnected dimensions of power. First,

power reflects the capacity to influence the practices and beliefs of others, as articulated by Weber (1978). Second, Foucault (1991) provides a more nuanced view of power, suggesting that it is embedded not just in formal structures but in everyday practices, norms, and institutions that shape people's opportunities. Power operates through these channels, influencing how individuals navigate and experience labour markets. Peluso and Ribot (2020) expand on these ideas by highlighting how access is governed by a 'bundle of powers' exercised through various social and material processes. These processes and relationships—whether based on family, ethnicity, or community ties—intersect with material resources and institutional power to shape who has the ability to access and control resources. Importantly, these socio-political and material factors are not fixed; they evolve over time, altering the dynamics of power and, consequently, the forms of access to resources.⁵

Access to labour markets is also significantly influenced by social networks, including connections with influential individuals, often referred to as *sababu* in the context of Sierra Leone (Enria 2018) or *wasta* in the Arabic world (Abosag and Ghauri 2022; Mann 2014; Ramady 2016). These key connections can facilitate or hinder access to employment opportunities, demonstrating that labour markets are not purely meritocratic but shaped by existing social hierarchies and power dynamics. The role of such connections confirms that the structure of labour markets, as well as access to work, is socially constructed and mediated by relational power. Therefore, the concept of access and its attainment through mechanisms such as *wasta* or *sababu* illustrates that the ability to access labour opportunities and the resources necessary for those opportunities are frequently influenced by the power dynamics inherent in particular labour markets.

In this context, power is analysed through access to social membership, networks or resources, depending on the relevant factors. While the concept of social capital has been employed extensively in studies of labour markets and socio-economic access (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001), this study deliberately opts for an alternative framework that explicitly

⁵ This approach differs from Sen's (2000) capabilities framework, which focuses on individuals' intrinsic abilities to achieve well-being and access opportunities. While Sen emphasises personal freedom and agency in converting resources into valuable outcomes, the discussion here is concerned with the external socio-political forces and power dynamics that shape access to resources, often beyond the individual's control.

focuses on power dynamics. The emphasis on social capital can provide useful insights into social networks; however, as Fine (2000, 2010) argues, it often reduces multifaceted social relationships into mere economic outcomes, failing to adequately capture power relations and their role in shaping labour market access. Moreover, neo-classical economists often treat social capital as an extension of human capital, which limits its explanatory power and obscures the underlying structural inequalities. Therefore, the approach in this study prioritises an understanding of power that addresses socio-political and historical dimensions overlooked by other theories. Likewise, human capital and rational choice theories simplify inequality by focusing only on individual-level metrics, such as income, which fail to account for the broader structural forces that shape labour outcomes (Bourdieu 1986; Fraser 2000).

To fully understand the dynamics of labour markets and the inequalities within them, it is crucial to move beyond the limited application of human capital and rational choice theories, as well as the neo-classical macroeconomic view on labour markets, especially their methodological individualism in contexts of violence and conflict. While these theories offer useful insights in certain areas, their application to labour market outcomes in conflict-affected settings is problematic. By focusing on individual investments in skills or 'capital', they overlook the socio-political determinants and power dynamics that profoundly shape labour markets. A more effective approach is to examine labour markets through the lens of labour regimes, which add a critical layer of analysis that goes beyond the scope of individual-focused theories. Although labour regimes emphasise recruitment practices (Bair 2019; Wells 1996) more than labour market access, they are valuable for understanding how power, control, and labour reproduction are structured and maintained across different work contexts. Wells' (1996) ethnographic study of agricultural labour markets in California, for instance, highlights how legal, historical, and socio-political factors influence labour market dynamics, reinforcing the importance of examining labour markets through a socio-political lens. Burawoy's (1985) analysis of 'factory regimes' exemplifies this, showing how social, political, and economic factors shape workplace control mechanisms and the interactions between capital and labour. Labour regimes, therefore, reflect the influence of broader political economies and the dynamic interplay between workers and management.

Selwyn (2012) situates labour regimes within broader development dynamics, demonstrating how state power and capital jointly shape labour conditions. Labour regimes extend beyond workplaces and are embedded in state policies, local power relations, local power relations, and production dynamics. Mezzadri (2016) refines this by highlighting how gender, class, and social reproduction intersect with labour regimes within global supply chains, stressing that unpaid care work sustains labour forces. Baglioni et al. (2022:3) define labour regimes as "historically shaped, multi-dimensional phenomena resulting from negotiations over local social dynamics, which intersect, either directly or indirectly, with the commercial requirements of leading corporations within global production networks, as well as with the gendered and racially influenced dynamics of social reproduction". This underscores how both global market demands and local socio-cultural dynamics shape labour relations and conditions.

In rural North Kordofan, labour regimes must reflect local realities, where global value chains are less significant than local and national enterprises and state employment. The Sudanese government, the country's largest employer, along with development partners, plays a central role in shaping labour dynamics. Localised power relations and historical contingencies deeply influence how labour is organised and controlled in these settings.

One compelling aspect of the labour regime approach is its recognition of harmful labour practices, including exploitation across production, social reproduction, circulation, and ecology, highlighting the interconnectedness of economic and environmental dimensions (Baglioni, Campling, Mezzadri, et al. 2022). These practices are shaped by identities such as gender, caste, and class, contributing to differentiated vulnerabilities (Mezzadri 2016). The legacy of colonialism continues to influence bonded labour and casualisation, perpetuating exploitative labour conditions (Banaji 2010; Breman 2013; Lerche 2022). In addition, rural village women's lack of bargaining power and economic desperation in agricultural and informal sectors exemplifies persistent exploitation (Sender and Cramer 2022). While labour regime theorists do not always explicitly frame these practices as 'violence' or discuss the impact of war on labour in conflict-affected regions, their framework sheds light on systemic labour-related violence embedded within everyday work.

Understanding labour regimes in rural Sudan also necessitates a place-based analysis. Jonas (1996, 2009) conceptualises Local Labour Control Regime (LLCR) as geographically and

historically specific mechanisms that coordinate production, work, and the reproduction of labour. These regimes are shaped by social relationships and power structures, which both control and reproduce labour relations through coercion and domination. Although Jonas does not frame these mechanisms directly as 'violence', he acknowledges their coercive nature within local labour dynamics. Expanding on Jonas' framework, Pattenden (2016) emphasises how local socio-economic conditions and global capital flows interact to shape labour regimes. This perspective is crucial in rural Sudan, where local labour regimes are influenced by both national policies and local dynamics, creating a complex interplay of control, negotiation, and resistance.

In conclusion, shifting from a singular economic understanding of labour markets to exploring them through labour regimes offers a more nuanced perspective on socio-political and historical factors shaping labour conditions. Labour regimes, by focusing on power dynamics, control mechanisms, and the interplay between global and local influences, offer a deeper understanding of labour relations and labour market dynamics.

2.5.2 Labour Classification: Which Work is Legitimate?

Moving on from the examination of labour markets and labour regimes with a focus on access, it is essential to explore how neo-classical economic perspectives have influenced the classification of labour status, particularly in relation to employment and unemployment. While neo-classical economists typically rely on standard statistical categories—such as those used by the International Labour Organization (ILO)—to define employment and unemployment, these categories often fail to account for broader social factors that affect labour market access. For instance, the ILO (2013:6) defines employment as "any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit", while unemployment refers to individuals not currently employed but actively seeking work (2013:9). Together, employed and unemployed individuals form the 'labour force', defined as the "supply of labour for the production of goods and services in exchange for pay or profit" (2013:3).

As a partial response to critiques of official labour statistics not reflecting the reality of work, the ILO has updated its classification and definitions of key labour concepts over the decades. However, these changes still fall short of fully addressing the exclusion and

undervaluation of reproductive labour. Initially, the ILO (1993) employed a simple dichotomy of employment versus unemployment,⁶ but later evolved to a more nuanced categorisation of five forms of work, including ‘employment’ (2013).⁷ Further refinements led to definitions of ‘job’ and ‘work’ as “a set of tasks and duties performed” (ILO 2018b:2), distinguished by ‘type of authority’ and ‘type of economic risk’. Despite these revisions, the classifications continue to centre on national accounts and the monetary economy (Lequiller et al. 2014:3), systematically ignoring and undervaluing unpaid, particularly social reproductive, labour. This exclusion effectively renders certain forms of work invisible and denies economic and social recognition of those who perform it.

In addition, the classification of work is valid only for a specific point in time—typically during the one-week survey window—limiting the understanding of seasonal employment dynamics, often undertaken by those lacking access to stable work. This limited survey period overlooks the contributions of seasonal labourers, marginalising them in official labour statistics. Breman (1996) highlights that seasonal labour in rural India, often performed by marginalised groups without social security or stable employment, is less likely to be captured in these surveys. Likewise, Martin (2009) argues that migrant and seasonal agricultural workers in the United States, primarily from marginalised communities, are frequently excluded from formal labour protections and thus overlooked in labour force data. This temporal limitation perpetuates the invisibility of these workers, disregarding their economic contributions and socio-economic vulnerabilities, thereby reinforcing the institutionalised marginalisation in labour classification systems.

For decades, labour regime theorists and feminist political economists—many identifying as both—have criticised orthodox economic theories and official labour classifications for ignoring the productive value of social reproductive work (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 1975; Fraser 2013; Mezzadri 2016, 2019; Standing 2018). Federici (1975) argues that capitalism has rendered reproductive labour, particularly women's unpaid domestic work, invisible by relegating it to the private sphere, despite its essential role in sustaining the labour force. Fraser (2013) further contends that this invisibility perpetuates gender

⁶ Employment was initially understood as ‘self-employment’ and ‘paid employment’.

⁷ The other forms of work are: (1) own-use production work;(2) unpaid trainee work;(3) volunteer work; and, (4) other work activities.

inequalities by denying unpaid caregivers the recognition afforded to wage earners, thereby limiting comprehensive social and economic support systems and entrenching inequalities.

Bhattacharya (2017) argues that labour classifications entirely exclude social reproduction, treating it as non-productive. She critiques the binary classification of productive and reproductive work, asserting that ignoring social reproduction's contribution perpetuates gender and class oppression by dismissing essential unpaid labour. Mezzadri (2019) similarly posits that unpaid and wageless labour is a “condition” of capitalist production, systematically exploited without recognition or compensation. Stevano et al. (2021) amplify this perspective, highlighting the pivotal role of households and reproductive work within the capitalist framework. Recognising the value of reproductive work would challenge traditional capitalist analysis, necessitating a re-evaluation of labour measurement and economic policies, ultimately promoting equitable support systems for unpaid caregivers and challenging existing power dynamics.

The work of these theorists has prompted international labour policymakers to acknowledge critiques of existing frameworks, albeit partially and belatedly. The latest international classification of work status (ILO 2018a) now recognises reproductive work as a distinct form of ‘work’, yet the dualistic distinction between ‘own-use goods’ (included in GDP) and ‘own-use services’ (excluded from GDP) persists, as established by the System of National Accounts (SNA) (UN 2008). Consequently, domestic work for personal use remains outside the SNA production boundary. This partial recognition underscores the challenges in changing entrenched economic frameworks that prioritise market-based activities over essential social reproduction. By excluding ‘own-use services’, such as domestic work, from GDP, these frameworks continue to undervalue reproductive labour, perpetuating its invisibility in economic analysis and policymaking.

Standing (2006) critiques the entrenched, economics-centric classification system, particularly the pervasive dichotomy between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ work, and between ‘employed’ and ‘unemployed’. This framework disregards work without remuneration or profit, rendering it invisible within labour studies (Standing 2018). Such oversight stems from the presumption that unpaid or informal work lies outside labour markets, ignoring its crucial role in sustaining ‘productive’ labour markets.

Even within ostensibly clear-cut categories such as 'employed' vs. 'unemployed' or 'formal' vs. 'informal', the lived realities are far from straightforward. Cramer, Oya, and Sender (2008) re-evaluate employment tenure and work conditions in Mozambique, categorising work by job types, payment rates, and methods. Their analysis reveals substantial variation within 'employment,' covering both "‘good' jobs" and "‘bad' jobs" (Cramer et al. 2008:377), with employment often being transient and subject to seasonal fluctuations. Similarly, Skinner, Devey, and Valodia's (2006) study in South Africa extends the boundaries of 'informality', documenting how formal and informal work intersect. Notably, many informal workers maintain permanent relationships with their employers, contrasting with only 16% of formal employees. These examples illustrate how rigid classifications can obscure the true complexities of work dynamics, informality, and employment quality.

The conventional understanding of labour terms, as framed by international policymakers, often fails to align with local realities. This disconnect is evident in the influence of social norms on what is deemed legitimate employment—a theme also highlighted in earlier feminist critiques of the undervaluation of reproductive labour due to its unpaid nature. Enria (2018) demonstrates how the definition of 'employment' used by policymakers does not reflect the lived experiences of youth in post-conflict Sierra Leone's informal labour market. For these young people, informal work is a necessity, yet it is often dismissed as not 'real' employment, despite being critical for their survival. Social norms shape perceptions of legitimacy, marginalising informal work and denying it social value and protection. This evidence underscores the limitations of official classifications, emphasising the need for frameworks that better reflect local and social realities.

Similarly, understanding changes in whose labour is valued and for what reasons requires a historical and place-based approach to labour regimes. Bernal (1994) explores how women's work in a Sudanese village became increasingly confined to the domestic sphere, despite their labour being a prerequisite for capitalist production. She argues that this transformation was not solely driven by economic factors but was deeply tied to shifts in power, social expectations, and religious ideology. Capitalist restructuring pushed men into wage labour and off-farm work, while women were relegated to unpaid domestic tasks to 'free' men to focus on wage employment. Despite being central to the functioning of the household and wider economy, women's work became increasingly devalued because it did

not directly contribute to capital accumulation. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism further entrenched these gender roles, reinforcing women's dependency on their husbands and confining them to an 'invisible' domestic sphere. Bernal's analysis reveals that while women's work remains essential for the reproduction of labour power, it has become increasingly marginalised under the capitalist system, reflecting broader processes of gendered exploitation.

The core theoretical disagreement between many orthodox economists and labour regime theorists, including feminist political economists, lies in their conceptualisation of work and employment. Orthodox economists, whose views heavily influence international policymaking, define work primarily through remuneration and profit, thus valuing only monetary gains. This narrow perspective shapes policy frameworks that often overlook the diverse realities of labour markets, especially where non-remunerated labour is vital. In contrast, labour regime theorists argue for a broader understanding of work, one that includes unpaid and non-remunerated labour, which sustains the capitalist economy. This fundamental divide highlights that while orthodox theories and their derived policies prioritise economic metrics, alternative approaches emphasise the importance of social reproductive labour. Recognising such labour challenges conventional economic analyses, expanding the theoretical discourse to include the full spectrum of contributions within labour regimes.

The limitations of traditional labour classifications highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of work that accounts for the diverse realities of labour markets, including unpaid and informal labour. While conventional frameworks often marginalise these forms of work, they play an essential role in sustaining both the economy and society. Moving forward, it is crucial to consider how systemic biases and exclusions not only shape labour classifications but also reinforce inequalities and forms of control within labour markets and labour classification. The next section will explore how these exclusions and systemic biases manifest as invisible forms of force and coercion, deepening our understanding of the violence inherent in labour market and labour regime dynamics.

2.6 Categorical Violence: Connecting Labour, Work, and Violence

2.6.1 Invisible Violence in Labour

This broader exploration of the structuring of labour regimes (Section 2.5.1) and social meanings and classification of work (Section 2.5.2) reveals complex links between labour and various forms of harmful practice such as exploitation, control, abuse, discrimination, devaluation and unrecognition that have been found in labour experience. These exploitative labour practices embody overlapping forms of violence, such as symbolic (Bourdieu 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004; Rose 2021), structural (Farmer 1996, 2004; Galtung 1969b; Scheper-Hughes 1992), and everyday (Rivas 2020; Scheper-Hughes 1992). These forms of violence are interconnected and do not exist in isolation; rather, they operate both through discrete categories and as part of a broader continuum of violence (Bourgeois 2004; Cockburn 2009).⁸ Further analysis highlights that the act of categorising and classifying people and their labour is deeply embedded within these forms of violence—a phenomenon I refer to as *categorical violence*, building on Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical inequality. As I develop the concept further, this section examines various forms of non-physical and invisible violence in the world of work, focusing on how labour market and labour regime dynamics are linked to the maintenance and regeneration of these forms of violence.

2.6.1.1 Structural Violence

The systemic exploitation and discrimination we have explored so far resonate with the concept of structural violence. As articulated by Galtung (1969b), Farmer (2004) and Scheper-Hughes (1992), structural violence refers to the systematic disadvantage imposed on individuals by entrenched inequalities within social, economic, and political systems. Farmer et al. (2006:1686) define violence as “social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way.... The arrangements are *structural* because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are *violent* because they

⁸ The continuum of violence refers both to a spectrum of violence ranging from symbolic to physical, and to the dynamic interactions between these forms of violence. This idea highlights how different types of violence reinforce one another, rather than occurring as separate, distinct events (Bourgeois 2004; Cockburn 2009).

cause injury to people”. Although Farmer mentions ‘injury’ here, this form of violence is not necessarily direct or physical; rather, it manifests through societal structures that restrict access to basic needs, well-being, and opportunities. It creates disparities such as poverty, social exclusion, and unequal access to healthcare, education, and employment—outcomes that stem from policies and systems designed to maintain unequal distributions of power and resources.

One notable example is the exclusion of certain types of labour, such as unpaid reproductive work and informal labour, from official labour classifications. As highlighted by the ILO (2018b), the exclusion of social reproductive work—primarily carried out by women—denies economic and social recognition to those engaged in unpaid but essential labour. This lack of recognition limits access to social protections and economic resources, perpetuating the devaluation of care work and contributing to the continued marginalisation of women (Bhattacharya 2017; Fraser 2013). Moreover, this statistical exclusion reinforces broader forms of oppression and coercion. The invisibility of unpaid care work facilitates the economic exploitation of women by denying them fair compensation and social rights, such as access to pensions, healthcare, or unemployment benefits, forcing them into economic dependency and precarity (Mezzadri 2019).

Beyond economic exploitation, the devaluation of reproductive labour enables coercive practices, such as domestic servitude or the exploitation of migrant care workers, where power dynamics reinforce vulnerability and dependency (Anderson 2000). In extreme cases, this leads to direct physical violence, as women in unpaid domestic roles are often exposed to domestic violence with little legal recourse, a reality exacerbated by their lack of economic autonomy (Federici 1975, 2018). The systematic undervaluation of care work, therefore, not only marginalises women economically but also exposes them to structural violence and physical harm, all while keeping their labour invisible in official frameworks.

Similarly, the neglect of informal and seasonal workers further exemplifies structural violence. Workers in these sectors, as Breman (1996) points out in rural India and Martin (2009) notes in the U.S., are often not recorded in labour statistics, which significantly curtails their access to labour rights and social protections. This invisibility exacerbates their economic vulnerability and entrenches socio-economic inequalities for those in precarious, informal employment. Standing (2018) adds that the undervaluation of informal labour,

despite its crucial contributions to the economy, systematically denies these workers social security and formal recognition, perpetuating their marginalisation and economic instability.

The engagement of marginalised groups in violence can also be understood through the lens of structural violence. As Richards (1996) and Duffield (2001b) argue, in the absence of other opportunities, joining armed groups often becomes an informal form of labour for those stressed by socio-economic constraints. In this way, structural violence fuels participation in organised violence as a survival strategy when other avenues are closed off.

In addition, the legacy of bonded labour and casualisation, as explored by Breman (2013) and Banaji (2010), represents historical forms of structural violence that continue to exploit marginalised groups. These colonial-era practices, rooted in coercion and exploitation, trap individuals in cycles of labour exploitation, denying them opportunities for upward mobility. Slavery, as a form of primitive accumulation, illustrates how resources were transferred to capitalist elites, such as slave masters and landlords, often with state involvement (Byres 2005). These exploitative systems became deeply entrenched, creating long-lasting structures of inequality. Cramer and Richards (2011) argue that such accumulation processes not only generated capital but also created a wage labour class by dispossessing individuals of their means of production, forcing them to sell their labour. Marx's (1887) distinction between economic compulsion—where individuals are compelled to sell their labour power due to lack of access to means of production—and extra-economic compulsion—where violence, legal coercion, or political power is used to force labour—helps further illuminate how bonded labour and slavery relied on both economic pressures and outright coercion to perpetuate socio-economic inequalities through the systemic exploitation of marginalised communities.

2.6.1.2 Symbolic Violence

The processes of structural violence are deeply intertwined with symbolic violence, which operates at a more subtle, cultural level to reinforce and legitimise the systemic inequalities inherent in labour markets and social structures. Symbolic violence refers to the often unnoticed and internalised forms of coercion that occur through 'cultural' norms and social practices, maintaining power dynamics and legitimising hierarchical structures. In *Masculine*

Domination, Bourdieu (2001) illustrates how gender power dynamics become entrenched in social structures through symbolic violence—where domination is exerted subtly through cultural norms, language, and everyday practices, thus legitimising gender inequalities. Both men and women internalise these power structures as natural, making the domination invisible and seemingly unchallengeable as it becomes part of the ‘habitus’ that guides behaviour and perception.

Scholars under the influence of economic theories of violence posit a direct linkage between unemployment and violence, assuming that individuals with lower educational attainment and limited job prospects are more likely to engage in violence for economic gain. These assumptions arguably themselves embody symbolic violence by reinforcing stereotypes and devaluing individuals based on their education level and employment status. For instance, those with lower educational attainment, particularly young men, are often assumed to be more inclined toward violence due to their perceived economic vulnerability. This not only oversimplifies the complexities of their experiences but also legitimises their exclusion from socio-economic opportunities by categorising them as inherently prone to violence. By framing these individuals in such a reductive way, economic theories of violence contribute to the perpetuation of symbolic violence, reinforcing inequalities and marginalisation.

In the case of reproductive labour, particularly women’s unpaid domestic work, its devaluation constitutes a form of symbolic violence with significant consequences for how women’s work is valued. Federici (1975) and Fraser (2000, 2013) critique how reproductive labour is rendered invisible and not considered productive within capitalist structures, despite its essential role in sustaining labour markets. This exclusion reinforces gender hierarchies, subordinating women by making their labour socially invisible and economically insignificant. The historical construction of motherhood and reproductive labour as a moral duty imposed on women, framing them as biologically destined to care for others (de Beauvoir 1997), exemplifies symbolic violence. Similarly, in South Korea, the idealisation of women as homemakers played a critical role in justifying the institutional suppression of women's wages, particularly in export-oriented industries such as garments and textiles. As Seguíno (1997) argues, public discourse framed women’s primary role as caregivers, which was used to keep their wages low, contributing to South Korea’s industrial competitiveness. This economic exploitation of women’s labour was made possible by the cultural

idealisation of women's domestic roles, further entrenching their subordination. In Muslim societies, women's roles are often similarly framed through religious and cultural norms as natural caregivers (Mernissi 1987), legitimising the association of women with reproductive labour and perpetuating their subordination. These societal norms not only justify limiting women's labour opportunities to the domestic sphere but also legitimise the unpaid nature of social reproductive labour by framing it as an act of love for the family, suggesting that maternal devotion should naturally compel women to care for their families without compensation. This narrative further discourages women from seeking work outside the home, reinforcing the notion that they are inherently unsuited for roles that compete with men in labour markets. The gendering of labour markets and the classification of certain roles as 'women's work' (Bair 2022; Cohn 1985; Hartmann 1976) are direct consequences of this symbolic violence.

Also, the marginalisation of informal labour, as discussed by Enria (2018) in the context of youth in Sierra Leone, reflects another form of symbolic violence. Informal work is often perceived as not constituting 'real' employment, systematically devaluing those working outside formal job structures. Marginalised groups, including racial and ethnic minorities, migrants, and working-class individuals, are frequently pushed into informal, precarious labour (Davis 2006; Sassen 1998; Standing 2011), with some even trapped in modern forms of slavery (Davidson 2015). These groups also face entrenched negative stereotypes. For instance, African Americans have historically been labelled as lazy and unfit for modern labour (Du Bois 2014), a stereotype perpetuated by white working-class Americans to secure their economic status and racial privilege (Roediger 2007). Migrants, especially those from the Global South, are frequently framed in an 'us vs. them' narrative—viewed either as a threat to local jobs or as inherently suited for low-paid, unskilled work. These perceptions are shaped by racialised and class-based stereotypes about work ethic and worth (Anderson 2013). Similarly, gendered stereotypes, such as the notion that women possess 'nimble fingers', have long been used to justify the predominance of women in low-wage, repetitive work, particularly in industries such as electronics and textiles (Enloe 1990; Ong 1987). These gendered, racial, and class-based stereotypes reinforce symbolic violence by framing certain groups as naturally suited to inferior, low-status labour, further justifying their exclusion from higher-paid, formal employment. The societal norm that positions informal

and low-wage work as less valuable also perpetuates the internalisation of inferiority among marginalised workers, particularly women and ethnic minorities, who become resigned to their exclusion from socio-economic recognition and protection. These stereotypes and social expectations work together to maintain rigid hierarchies of value within labour markets, allowing systemic inequalities to persist unchallenged. As a result, symbolic violence becomes a tool for sustaining structural inequalities, deepening the marginalisation of those forced into precarious, undervalued work.

2.6.1.3 Everyday Violence

Both structural and symbolic violence, as embedded in labour practices such as slavery, perpetuate long-lasting inequalities that manifest as everyday violence in workers' daily lives. Everyday violence, as defined by Scheper-Hughes (1992), refers to subtle, normalised, and often invisible harm embedded in daily interactions. In labour contexts, this violence is reflected in routine practices of control and exploitation, reinforcing power dynamics that maintain socio-economic inequalities. Workplace discrimination, particularly against women, is pervasive, taking the form of continuous biases based on gender, race, or class. Female workers in sweatshops and domestic roles are frequently subjected to sexual harassment, long hours, and low pay, often without recognition of their basic rights (Mezzadri 2016). Verbal abuse and humiliation from employers (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 1975) inflict psychological harm and further entrench their marginalised status. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, young women are coerced by informal power brokers such as *sababu* to provide sexual favours in exchange for employment (Enria 2018), highlighting the intersection of gender and class that exacerbates everyday violence within informal work settings.

Informal workers also face routine control and surveillance. Agricultural and factory workers, especially bonded labourers, are constantly monitored by employers, stripping them of autonomy (Breman 2013). Casual workers in Mozambique endure daily uncertainty due to a lack of job security, compounding their vulnerability (Cramer et al. 2008). Discrimination, control, surveillance, and uncertainty are common experiences for those in informal and precarious labour, and these practices are so deeply embedded that they are

often accepted as normal. Everyday violence, therefore, not only functions as a tool of exploitation but also sustains broader systems of oppression within labour market and labour regime dynamics. The overlap between symbolic, structural, and everyday violence is particularly pronounced for women, informal, and seasonal workers, whose roles remain largely invisible, leaving them to face systemic barriers and a lack of recognition across various sectors.

2.6.1.4 A Continuum of Violence

The long-term, broader effects of violence must also be considered. Colonial legacies, combined with enduring socio-economic inequalities, have continued to marginalise certain groups, embedding coercive labour practices that persist today. These dynamics of exclusion and exploitation align with what Bourgois (2004) and Cockburn (2009), among others, conceptualise as the 'continuum of violence'. This framework demonstrates how different forms of violence—ranging from everyday interpersonal harm to large-scale political conflict—are deeply interconnected. Bourgois (2004) emphasises that structural violence, such as economic inequality and social marginalisation, normalises more overt forms of violence, including domestic abuse and organised crime, particularly in marginalised communities. Cockburn (2009) expands on this by examining how gendered violence and everyday sexism are not separate from the political violence of conflict zones but rather operate along the same continuum, reinforcing the very structural inequalities that sustain them.

This continuum of violence illustrates that these forms of harm are not isolated phenomena but part of a continuous process that upholds power relations and entrenched social inequalities. These dynamics are central to shaping both the value and meaning of labour, as well as the structures of labour markets and labour regimes. Everyday acts of discrimination and marginalisation, which might appear trivial, lay the groundwork for more overt and extreme forms of violence. In the world of work, this has translated into a historical pattern of systematic violence, shaping the ways in which labour is both organised and valued. Seemingly 'minor' acts of discrimination contribute to an environment that normalises deeper exploitation and oppression within the workplace. These more subtle, often

invisible, forms of violence tend to be overlooked in conventional analyses of employment and labour markets, yet they are essential to the maintenance of broader systems of inequality. While physical or political violence often draws more attention, these non-physical forms of violence are just as foundational in perpetuating inequalities, reinforcing power hierarchies, and deepening conflicts within labour systems.

In sum, the continuum of violence underscores that the injustices experienced by workers are not isolated incidents but part of a broader, interconnected system of oppression, and one that is also reproduced within a long-term, evolving historical context. From everyday workplace discrimination to the enduring legacies of colonial exploitation, these forms of violence are embedded in labour practices, continuously shaping labour market and labour regime dynamics while reinforcing social hierarchies. The continuum of violence links symbolic, structural, and everyday forms of violence, demonstrating how they operate together to reproduce and sustain inequalities across various contexts. Recognising this interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of violence within labour regimes is crucial for understanding how inequalities persist. This analysis sets the stage for exploring 'categorical violence' in the next section, deepening our understanding of how classification systems perpetuate these dynamics of violence.

2.6.2 Categorical Violence

The examination of symbolic, structural, and everyday violence, as well as the continuum of violence, reveals that these forms often are reproduced through classification systems. Whether applied to people, work, or both, classifications impose artificial boundaries on fluid social and economic realities. These boundaries systematically devalue certain types of labour and marginalise those who perform them—regardless of their central role in sustaining society—by elevating and valuing other groups of workers and their labour. Inspired by Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical inequality, particularly his ideas of categorical pairing and the four mechanisms underpinning the reproduction of inequalities, I propose the notion of *categorical violence* to explain how classification systems not only sustain but also reproduce inequalities, exploitation and marginalisation by reinforcing entrenched social hierarchies based on groups within labour market and labour regime

dynamics. Foucault's (1973) idea of the *episteme*—the framework that governs what is considered legitimate knowledge—further supports this by highlighting how classification reflects the assumptions of those with the power to classify, shaping society's understanding of reality. By assigning value to certain groups of labour while devaluing others, and making some groups more visible, classification sustains these hierarchies, and through institutionalisation, labour markets and labour regimes perpetuate the marginalisation of groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and migrants, whose work is often rendered invisible or undervalued.

2.6.2.1 Categorical Pairs

Tilly's (1999) framework of categorical inequality explains how divisions based on race, gender, ethnicity, and religion sustain unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power. These inequalities are not due to individual talent or effort but stem from entrenched social structures that privilege certain groups. While class inequality is shaped by these categorical divisions, it can be seen as a vertical dimension of exploitation that is supported by the intersection of these external categories. Anderson (2013) similarly shows how migrants from the Global South face an 'us vs. them' divide, echoing the historical racialisation and marginalisation of African Americans (Du Bois 2014; Roediger 2007). This supports Tilly's argument that categorisation is a social process through which inequalities are maintained and reinforced, as boundaries are drawn to protect the interests of certain groups. Over time, these divisions become institutionalised, embedding power imbalances within social, economic, and political systems. In this context, Tilly highlights the role of 'internal categories'—within organisations, such as employer-employee relationships, the division of labour, or job roles and occupational hierarchies, such as the distinction between 'director' and 'assistant'—and 'external categories' such as gender, race, and class, which intersect to reinforce social hierarchies. The pairing of these internal and external categories forms the "roots of categorical inequality" (Tilly 1999:15), justifying and normalising such classification-based pairing in labour regimes and society at large. For instance, women from marginalised racial or socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately confined to low-status roles, such as caregiving or domestic work (Fraser 2013; Ray and Qayum 2009). In this

case, the internal categories of caregiving or domestic work are paired with external categories of gender and marginalised racial or socio-economic backgrounds. This pairing legitimises and perpetuates the devaluation of such work, often rendering it unpaid or underpaid, thereby illustrating how external categories shape labour market outcomes.

This pairing of external categories, such as men/women, black/white, recent immigrants/longer established groups, Catholics/Protestants, is central to Tilly's framework for understanding categorical inequality, as it highlights how socially constructed divisions deepen inequality by matching specific groups to particular types of work within organisations and societal structures. While Tilly's focus is primarily on external categories, he also identifies the importance of internal categories—such as job roles and hierarchies within organisations—which intersect with external divisions to reinforce systemic inequality. The study of violence, as discussed so far, deepens our understanding of how such categorical pairing produces inequality in the workplace. Exploring symbolic, structural, and everyday violence, along with the continuum of violence, adds nuance and dimension to how classification systems justify and sustain these pairings. For instance, as discussed in the previous section, categorising women (external category) as caregivers (internal category) based on the assumption that they are naturally suited for care work constitutes symbolic violence. When these beliefs are sustained and normalised, they transform into structural violence, especially when women are underpaid or unpaid for caregiving, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating their marginalisation across broader social and labour structures.

While Tilly's framework distinguishes between internal categories (workplace dynamics) and external categories (social factors such as gender or race), my concept of categorical violence presents a more fluid relationship between these two, redefining their boundaries, particularly in the context of developing countries such as Sudan. In many such contexts, the family and home, rather than the formal workplace, are the primary sites of labour, where power dynamics based on gender, age, and status shape labour roles and expectations. This challenges the conventional notion of internal categories as purely workplace-based in a formal employment context. The idea of categorical violence emphasises the equally fundamental role of social reproductive labour, whether it takes place in the home or outside, in capitalist production. In my framework, 'internal' categories centre on the family

and domestic sphere, where ideas of masculinity, patriarchy, and femininity intersect with the family's labour history, labour aspirations, socio-economic and citizenship status, and local and global labour regime dynamics. These factors dictate who performs certain kinds of work, and in the case of social reproductive labour, often confine women, particularly eldest daughters, to this unpaid labour (Hepburn 2016). External categories, by contrast, encompass spaces outside the home, such as formal labour markets and broader social structures, where these family-based roles continue to shape the division of labour. By shifting the 'internal' lens to the family, rather than Tilly's conventional focus on the workplace, my framework highlights the centrality of the home as the primary workplace in capitalist labour regimes.

In addition, Tilly argues that external categories influence internal ones, suggesting that social differences shape people's work and their values. However, we have already seen that work and job types are themselves embedded with hierarchies, such as the distinction between 'employed' and 'unemployed' (Enria 2018), as well as those who occupy a liminal space in between (Standing 2011). These notions of work status are not fixed or static but should be understood as dynamic, shaped by power dynamics of recognition and valuation. These internal categories of work are not passive; they mutually reinforce external categories. In other words, internal categories of work and organisation are as important as external ones, and the politics of pairing is influenced not only by how society views external factors but also by how it defines and values internal factors, in line with Tilly's classification.

The binary distinction between internal (workplace) and external (social factors) categories becomes artificial in this context. Labour crucial to capitalist production—such as social reproductive work—occurs within the private, domestic sphere and, due to its private nature, is often treated as separate from formal, paid labour. The evidence presented later in this thesis demonstrates that these internal family dynamics, which categorise and limit the roles of women and other family members under patriarchal control, are deeply intertwined with how external labour markets value or devalue certain types of work. This reimagined framework exposes how categorical violence blurs and challenges the internal/external binary, demonstrating that violence and inequality are perpetuated across both spheres. By treating them as separate, the traditional framework overlooks the complexity of how labour and power intersect within both the family and labour regimes,

rendering the distinction flawed in a comprehensive understanding of violence and inequality in labour dynamics.

2.6.2.2 Four Mechanisms of Inequality-Making

Just as the concept of a continuum of violence accentuates the historical reproduction of violence, Tilly's categorical inequality is particularly useful in explaining *how* historical processes of classification sustain and regenerate forms of violence in everyday social and labour interactions. Rather than viewing inequalities and labour-related harm as isolated or fixed phenomena, his framework shows how categorical pairing leads to the normalisation of inequalities over time. Tilly (1999) explains that categorical pairs—socially constructed divisions such as gender, race, ethnicity or religion—are central to how inequalities are maintained through four key mechanisms: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation.

Exploitation—for Tilly, the most significant of these mechanisms—occurs when dominant groups use categorical pairs to justify unequal control over valuable resources, such as labour, while excluding others from fully benefiting. Examples include slavery or the appropriation of labour's value in informal sectors. The second mechanism, opportunity hoarding, involves privileged groups restricting access to resources and opportunities through exclusive networks or institutional practices, maintaining their dominance in key economic sectors. For instance, the pairing of 'native' and 'immigrant' becomes a means to exclude marginalised groups from job opportunities, reinforcing the boundaries created by these categories. The third mechanism, emulation, refers to the replication of unequal structures across different institutions. Once categorical pairs are institutionalised in one context, inequality often spreads to other organisations, perpetuating the same hierarchies. Finally, adaptation describes how categorical pairs are maintained and reproduced through social norms and everyday behaviours, making these inequalities appear 'natural' or inevitable—rather like the idea of 'symbolic violence' introduced above.

Through these mechanisms, classification not only organises social life but also perpetuates the violence and inequalities that arise from these divisions. This ensures that processes of exploitation and marginalisation continue across generations. For instance, stereotypes

about work ethic, such as viewing certain groups as ‘only good at fighting’ or ‘fit only for manual labour’, are not natural or objective facts. Instead, these stereotypes are matched to certain external categories of social membership, and over time, these categorical pairs are used to allocate opportunities unequally. This unequal relationship is then replicated in other contexts, becoming normalised and embedded in everyday life.

Sudan’s labour history, as examined in Chapter 4, demonstrates how medieval classifications of people based on skin colour and perceived labour traits (Cailliaud 1826), along with categorical matching, have historically discriminated against and oppressed darker-skinned groups, pushing them into slavery and modern forms of exploitation (Jok 2015; Sikainga 1996). This process illustrates how inequalities are sustained and normalised across generations through mechanisms such as opportunity hoarding and adaptation. Sikainga’s work further highlights how these mechanisms of categorical inequality persisted into colonial Sudan. After the formal abolition of slavery, racial and ethnic classifications continued to define labour regimes, with former slaves and darker-skinned Sudanese relegated to the lowest strata of wage labour. These individuals, once enslaved, were subject to economic coercion as colonial authorities recruited them into exploitative jobs in infrastructure projects, often justified by racial superiority. This transition from legal slavery to exploitative wage labour reinforced opportunity hoarding and exploitation, as lighter-skinned elites monopolised access to higher-paying jobs, leaving marginalised groups to perform the most devalued tasks. Sikainga illustrates how categorical pairs—such as ‘slave vs. free’—were maintained and adapted to serve the colonial capitalist system, devaluing darker-skinned labourers and normalising exploitative practices. This form of categorical violence continues in contemporary Sudan, where Northern Riverain Arab elites often describe darker-skinned Sudanese in derogatory terms, viewing them as ‘primitive Africans’ unfit for higher-level jobs (Abdelsalam 2008). Such statements reflect everyday violence intertwined with symbolic violence—associating darker skin with backwardness and slavery—and structural violence that perpetuates the socio-economic marginalisation of these groups through limited labour opportunities.

As Sikainga’s analysis demonstrates, race is a central ‘external’ factor influencing categorical inequality and labour regimes in Sudan. Robinson (1983) argues that racial capitalism has historically relied on racial distinctions to justify economic exploitation. In Sudan, these

racial classifications have shaped labour regimes, in which darker-skinned ethnic groups were systematically devalued and subjected to forms of exploitation and exclusion. Robinson's insights into the inherent racialisation of capitalist systems provide a foundational lens through which to understand these dynamics of labour. In the broader African context, Al-Bulushi (2022) highlights how racial capitalism extends beyond local contexts to operate as a global system, exploiting racialised groups for the benefit of dominant capital interests. This is evident in Sudan, where ethnic minorities have long been marginalised within both local and global labour markets. Focusing specifically on North Africa, Gross-Wyrtzen (2023) explores the entanglement of blackness and slavery in the region, illustrating how these historical legacies continue to shape labour relations in Sudan. This provides a vital context for understanding how racial hierarchies persist in shaping economic stratification and exploitation today.

As these examples show, racial capitalism is intertwined with the mechanisms of inequality-making, which are deeply entrenched in Sudan's labour history and present-day dynamics. These mechanisms underscore how these inequalities, along with the symbolic and structural violence they produce, are historical processes sustained over time by intersecting classifications. These classifications cross multiple levels and spaces, reinforcing the deeply embedded and persistent nature of inequality and exploitation in labour regimes. The study of violence further explains how these categorical pairs are realised. A focus on symbolic violence, along with structural violence, highlights how the exploitation stage of inequality-making emerges and how invisible, non-physical violence can eventually lead to visible, physical violence over time.

Tilly's concept of categorical inequality offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how social divisions, once established, become durable and institutionalised through various social mechanisms. Once embedded in institutions such as schools, labour markets, and legal systems, these inequalities become self-perpetuating. Such institutions not only reflect pre-existing inequalities but also actively shape access to resources, opportunities, and rewards, ensuring the persistence of these divisions. By adopting Tilly's analytical approach, we can better understand the connections between social dynamics, labour, and violence. This approach reframes inequalities not as natural outcomes of individual differences in ability or effort, and not as gradational across a population of

individuals, but as strategic results of institutional interactions that have evolved over time to maintain the advantages of certain groups. Understanding this framework allows us to explore how labour markets and labour regimes, as social institutions, are implicated in the maintenance and regeneration of various forms of violence.

Based on the discussion of various forms of violence, categorical violence offers a critical tool for understanding patterns of exploitation and injustice. Unlike symbolic violence, which operates through cultural norms and internalised perceptions, structural violence, which functions at a systemic and institutional level, and everyday violence, which manifests in routine, normalised incidents, categorical violence explains how and why specific groups are subjected to these intersecting forms of violence. By creating artificial distinctions between groups and types of work, categorical violence reflects power dynamics and highlights the socio-economic dividing lines that emerge through these classifications. While categorical violence centres on the act of classification, it remains largely invisible, even as it reinforces symbolic, structural, or everyday violence. However, as part of the continuum of violence (Bourgois 2004), where these forms of violence co-exist and mutually reinforce each other, categorical violence can also be weaponised to fuel broader social conflicts, where 'us vs. them' divisions are intensified, as seen in conflicts such as in Rwanda (Mamdani 2002) or Sudan (Deng 1995; Gallopin 2024; Idris 2019; Jok 2015; Verhoeven 2024).⁹ Categorical violence, therefore, not only justifies wars but also operates alongside both physical and non-physical violence.

Classification is also closely linked to the notion of visibility. By categorising certain groups as distinct and visible, these classifications shape who becomes recognised and who remains unrecognised and invisible. For example, the categorisation of women and their work has often rendered their contributions invisible, even though they are central to society. This invisibility is a form of injustice tied directly to the power dynamics embedded within classification systems. These dynamics determine whose work is valued and whose

⁹ Both the RSF and SAF perpetuate an 'us vs. them' narrative in Darfur and other regions of Sudan, leveraging ethnic divisions to exert control. The RSF, predominantly composed of Darfur and Kordofan Arab pastoralists, has been implicated in the ethnic cleansing of the Masalit, an African farming group, as reported by Human Rights Watch (Gallopin 2024). Meanwhile, the SAF, supported by Northern Riverain elites, continues to exploit power structures inherited from previous regimes, reinforcing structural and symbolic violence against Darfurians. Although the RSF's atrocities draw more international attention, the SAF plays an equally critical role in sustaining systemic oppression and inequality through the state's continuum of violence.

contributions are marginalised, reinforcing existing inequalities. The next section will delve deeper into these power dynamics and their role in maintaining and reproducing violence across labour regimes.

2.6.2.3 Categorical Violence in Theorising Violence and Labour

The concept of categorical violence provides a lens through which we can interrogate not only the material world of labour but also the politics of theoretical constructs and knowledge production, particularly the way labour and violence are framed in academic discourse. Foucault (1973) highlights that classification systems not only reflect the assumptions of those in power but also actively shape society's understanding of reality. These systems structure what Foucault terms the episteme—the framework that governs what is considered legitimate knowledge at any given time. This process is not neutral; classification is inherently political, as it determines what is visible, valued, and knowable within a society. By doing so, it reinforces existing power hierarchies while marginalising other forms of understanding that do not fit within the status quo.

When we apply this understanding of classification to the way orthodox economics has dominated the conceptualisation of labour and its relationship to violence, we can better understand how power dynamics are reshaped through economic classifications. Mitchell (2008) argues that the success of economic explanations lies in their narrow focus, which deliberately excludes social or political factors. This narrowing of scope allows economists to present their findings as objective 'facts', effectively ruling out alternative explanations, such as the role of household work patterns and informal economies. By framing the economy in such limited terms, economists impose classifications that serve their discipline, rendering the broader dynamics of labour and violence invisible.

Let me further illustrate Mitchell's point. Despite the pervasive effects of classification systems, they are often taken for granted as reflecting objective truths. Theorists supporting the selective application of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and Say's Law in shaping international development and peacebuilding efforts tend to view these systems in labour markets and economic analysis as neutral and apolitical. For instance, human capital theory (Becker 1964; Samuelson 1971; Schultz 1961) treats education, training, and skills as

measurable inputs to determine labour market outcomes. Similarly, rational choice theory (Becker 1968; Buchanan and Tullock 1969) assumes that categories such as 'rational' or 'irrational' actors are untouched by social or political forces. Economists like Friedman (1968), Keynes (1936), and Kuznets (1973) frequently treat employment status such as 'employed' and 'unemployed' as objective measures, often neglecting the social and political assumptions embedded within these categories, or overlooking the nuances of 'seasonal' or 'temporary' employment (Bremner 1996; Standing 2011). This apolitical framing, however, hides the reality that the very data used to create such classifications are deeply shaped by political and logistical biases. Cramer, Sender, and Oqubay (2020) show that data collection often focuses on more accessible urban areas, ignoring rural and conflict-affected regions. Such biases are particularly evident in developing regions like Africa, where logistical difficulties and political priorities distort the data, making it problematic to claim that these classifications represent 'observable facts'. These limitations highlight the need to critically assess classifications that are presented as neutral but are, in fact, deeply shaped by economic and political power.

In the theorisation of violence, categorical violence also manifests through the dominance of approaches to violence drawing on orthodox economics. The assumption that economics is superior to other social sciences, as argued by 'economic imperialists' such as Becker (1978) and Hirshleifer (1994), as discussed in Section 2.3, exemplifies this form of categorical violence. By relying on narrow metrics—such as using male secondary school enrolment rate to predict violence—and focusing primarily on civil war (Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Collier and Sambanis 2002), economists narrow the scope of violence by excluding broader understandings, such as structural or symbolic violence.

This exclusion of non-economic forms of violence aligns with how peacebuilding interventions often centre on employment and vocational training as tools for peace. By doing so, they impose a value system shaped by economic methods and frameworks while disregarding the socio-political complexities inherent in labour and violence dynamics. Hirshleifer's (1994:11) portrayal of other social scientists as "a-theoretical aborigines" who are "intellectually primitive", even if intended as tongue-in-cheek, illustrates the symbolic and everyday violence inherent in economic imperialism, further marginalising alternative perspectives.

Despite this narrow focus—or perhaps because of its perceived precision—such economic approaches have gained traction among international policymakers. In development and peacebuilding, the economic focus on employment generation and vocational training as primary peacebuilding tools has become a widely adopted intervention strategy (Brück et al. 2021; Ralston 2014). This trend illustrates Tilly's mechanisms of inequality-making, particularly emulation and adaptation, as one discipline becomes more visible and legitimate while other perspectives are sidelined. This reminds us of the way in which development and peacebuilding interventions continue to use the theory of change rooted in selective application of human capital and rational choice theories and macroeconomic theories on violence, often overlooking or downplaying local structural and historical contexts.

Mosse (2004) further critiques this dynamic, arguing that development agencies frequently disregard project shortcomings or harmful impacts to justify continued programming. This strategic oversight can be understood as a form of categorical violence, where development workers impose rigid classifications and norms that reinforce symbolic and structural violence by privileging economic logics and limiting space for alternative understandings of labour and violence. In doing so, these agencies impose a form of epistemic closure, drawing disciplinary boundaries that validate certain economic perspectives while marginalising others. This silencing of alternative approaches not only reinforces established power structures but also perpetuates an incomplete and often harmful understanding of labour and conflict in peacebuilding contexts.

This section has examined how classification systems create artificial distinctions between groups, systematically devaluing certain types of work and the people who perform them. These systems not only sustain and reinforce entrenched social hierarchies but also extend into theoretical frameworks that influence how labour and violence are understood and addressed in policy and academia. By exploring categorical violence, we see how the pairing of internal and external categories—such as gender, race, and socio-economic status—further solidifies inequalities and perpetuates exploitation. The mechanisms of inequality-making, such as exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation, show how these classifications become institutionalised, embedded in everyday life, and normalised over generations. This violence is not limited to the physical or visible; it operates at both a

symbolic and structural level, often remaining invisible but deeply embedded in social and economic systems.

Classification is inherently linked to questions of visibility and invisibility. By rendering some groups and forms of labour visible—those that conform to dominant classifications—the system simultaneously consigns others to invisibility, devaluing and unrecognising their contributions. For instance, the exclusion of social reproductive work from official labour categories perpetuates the invisibility of women’s labour, reflecting a deeper injustice. This artificial separation between visible and invisible labour reinforces the marginalisation of certain groups, often denying them recognition, protection, and access to resources. Thus, the very act of classifying is not neutral; it enforces a power dynamic where some forms of work and labourers are seen, acknowledged, and valued, while others are rendered invisible, perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Furthermore, this analysis highlights how economic imperialism in the academic and policy realms, especially through apolitical and asocial classifications, reinforces narrow, economically driven perspectives on labour and violence. The prioritisation of quantifiable data and the dominance of economic frameworks over more nuanced, multi-dimensional approaches contribute to the marginalisation of alternative perspectives. This, in turn, reflects and sustains forms of categorical violence that are institutionalised and difficult to challenge. Ultimately, recognising the role of categorical violence in both labour and peace studies is crucial for understanding how inequalities are maintained and reproduced. This understanding lays the foundation for a more critical and comprehensive examination of how classification systems shape social realities and perpetuate violence in all its forms.

2.7 Conclusion

International development interventions in post-conflict settings commonly draw on sets of ideas that posit a direct link between unemployment and violence. On the basis of these ideas, post-conflict interventions often focus on generating employment through vocational and skills training. The ‘theory of change’ is that building skills and the ‘human capital’ of, especially, young males will enable them to find wage employment, which in turn will raise the opportunity cost of engaging in violence (and the cost of recruitment for potential

insurgents). This theory of change and the ideas informing it has been influenced by orthodox, neo-classical economics—the common macroeconomic idea that unemployment is determined in the labour market, the human capital version of the Say's Law idea that the supply (of trained workers) creates its own demand, and the application to the 'choice' of violence of the fundamental axioms of neo-classical economics: methodological individualism, ordinally ranked instrumental rationality of choices, and utility maximisation.

This chapter has shown that these approaches to violence tend to oversimplify the complex dynamics of labour and violence, often neglecting the socio-political, historical, and structural factors that significantly shape these phenomena. By applying a political economy perspective and drawing on ethnographic research, the chapter highlights the limitations of economic frameworks of violence and underscores the importance of recognising the intersecting power dynamics, exploitation, and inequalities inherent in labour markets.

Moving beyond these traditional economic views, this chapter has also explored how labour markets and employment are conceptualised and classified from the perspectives of feminist political economy and the labour regime approach. This analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of how power, control, and social structures influence the value and meaning attributed to labour in diverse contexts. It challenges the assumption that labour markets are neutral spaces, showing instead that they are deeply embedded in historical, social, and political dynamics that perpetuate inequality. Specifically, the exclusion of informal and social reproductive labour from formal economic or statistical classifications devalues the contributions of women and marginalised groups, perpetuating their exploitation. The politics of classification is also linked to the dynamics of visibility and invisibility—those who are recognised within formal economic classifications gain social legitimacy, while others, such as women performing social reproductive work, remain invisible and undervalued. Recognising these overlooked forms of labour is crucial for developing a fuller understanding of economic and social contributions, rather than focusing solely on formal, remunerated employment.

Introducing the concept of categorical violence as an analytical tool in this thesis provides a critical framework for examining how classification systems perpetuate inequality and violence within labour regimes. Drawing on Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical inequality and Foucault's (1973) theory of the episteme, the framework reveals how the classification

of people and types of work entrenches social and economic hierarchies. These systems of classification not only determine access to labour markets but also facilitate the exclusion and exploitation of specific groups, further connecting discrimination and marginalisation in labour to broader forms of violence—symbolic, structural, and everyday. Categorical violence thus highlights the deeply interconnected nature of these different forms of violence, while also illuminating the injustice of invisibility: certain groups and their labour contributions are systematically rendered invisible through classification. This makes it clear that visibility and legitimacy are central to understanding how inequalities and violence are perpetuated in both theoretical frameworks and practical realities.

By focusing on how people and work are classified in rural areas, which international peacebuilding interventions often target based on the association of rural areas with resource competition, economic vulnerabilities and increased violence, and examining how these classifications relate to labour-based violence, this thesis establishes the basis for a deeper exploration of rural labour regimes in Sudan. It will analyse how today's discriminatory labour practices evolved, how the definitions of labour were shaped, and how access to rural labour markets is controlled and restricted. The framework of categorical violence provides a critical lens through which to understand how these processes sustain and reproduce violence, shaping the socio-economic realities of marginalised groups and continuing to influence rural labour markets and labour regimes. Ultimately, this approach underscores the need to challenge these classification systems to address the root causes of exploitation and violence in labour contexts.

Chapter 3 Researching Rural Labour Regimes during the Sudanese Revolution: Case Study Rationale and Methodology

3.1 Conflict Affected Rural Labour Regimes in Sudan: Case Selection

3.1.1 Overall Research Approach and Methodological Challenges

This study explores rural labour regimes in Sudan, focusing on the social meanings and categorisation of work and labour market access within the country's evolving political economy. By examining how work is conceptualised, classified, organised, and accessed, particularly across different social groups, the research identifies labour-related harm, exploitation, and multiple forms of violence that are sustained and reproduced through the workings of labour regimes. The study also addresses policy aspects of work in Sudan, first by analysing the last national labour force survey to assess whether it reflects the reality of work in the country, and second by examining vocational training for employment generation (VT/EG) projects for peacebuilding. It critically investigates whether vocational training generates employment and, if so, whether this employment addresses violence and fosters peace as intended, taking into account the socio-political structures that sustain and regenerate violence. As Wibben (2020) argues, these forms of violence often go unrecognised in the traditional peacebuilding interventions, which rely on narrow economic frameworks rooted in selective applications of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and neo-classical macroeconomics, neglecting the everyday insecurities and violence faced by women and marginalised groups and perpetuating forms of structural and symbolic violence.

A central challenge in this research arises from the reliance on quantitative economic methodologies in peacebuilding interventions (Cramer 2006a), which focus on measuring economic factors such as employment rates and productivity as definitive facts. National surveys, like the 2013 labour force survey and donor-led peacebuilding interventions, which depend on these data, primarily measure formal, remunerated work. However, as Oya (2013) highlights, labour statistics in developing contexts often suffer from 'data poverty', with surveys either incomplete or of poor quality. Data collection in regions like Sudan is

also influenced by power dynamics, logistical challenges, and the politics of violence (Cramer et al. 2020), further questioning the validity of the results drawn from such data. These national surveys and the peacebuilding interventions that rely on them often fail to capture the complexity of rural work, particularly the centrality of informal and social reproductive labour in the rural economies of developing countries such as Sudan (Cramer 2015; Mezzadri 2019). In line with critiques from scholars including Fine (1998) and Cramer (2002, 2009), this research challenges the assumption that economic processes can be understood in isolation from their social and historical contexts. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study complements quantitative economic analysis with qualitative research, exploring how individuals and communities navigate labour regimes shaped by structural inequalities and various forms of violence.

As part of this qualitative approach, this study employs life history interviews and ethnographic fieldwork to capture the complexity of rural labour dynamics. These methods provide a deeper understanding of how rural Sudanese workers experience training, employment, social reproductive labour, informal labour, and various forms of violence in their daily work-lives. The research examines who performs which jobs, for what reasons, how different types of work are valued, and how individuals access work—not only through vocational training but also via social networks, family ties, and local power dynamics. Similar to Wells (1996), this study reveals how social, economic, and political factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, local production relations, and citizenship shape access to labour markets and determine how different types of work are valued within these systems. Drawing on Foucault's (1973) concept of power, the study explores how power relations influence the organisation and control of labour, determining who has access to work and whose work is valued or devalued. It also engages with Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical inequality, revealing how social categories such as gender, ethnicity, and race are institutionalised within labour regimes, contributing to the marginalisation, exclusion, and unrecognition of certain groups as well as certain rural regions such as Kordofan. These narratives illuminate both the social organisation and meaning of work, and how power and inequality sustain entrenched hierarchies through labour regime dynamics.

As this thesis is motivated by my experience and reflection as a development and humanitarian worker in Sudan between 2012 and 2016, reflexivity (Davies 2008; Geertz

1972) serves as a key methodological tool to explore various forms of violence, especially those that are invisible and normalised. During my work in Sudan, I observed a significant disconnect between international development policies and the realities of work-life, particularly in relation to VT/EG projects. While these initiatives were intended to support peacebuilding and economic development, they often lacked the necessary contextualisation and failed to engage with the complex social and economic structures on the ground. In critically analysing the assumptions and shortcomings of these interventions—most of which originated from outsiders like myself, who, often unknowingly due to ignorance of the long and rich history of Sudanese labour, imposed assumptions from advanced economies onto Sudan’s unique realities—I draw on my reflections as a practitioner. These reflections help me to consider the shared mindsets and dynamics that may explain the limitations, and at times, the violence, inherent in such interventions. However, I remain mindful of the sensitive nature of my previous work and, therefore, approach these reflections from a personal perspective, focusing on broader insights rather than specific experiences or organisational details. Also, importantly, all the data used in this thesis has been newly collected and confirmed from original sources, even when referring to events or dynamics that occurred during my previous work. This ensures that the research is grounded in direct and current findings, rather than relying on data from my past roles.

Another methodological challenge emerged from navigating uncertainty, safety, and security risks in a rapidly evolving environment. Fieldwork was conducted between January and September 2019, coinciding with the Sudanese Revolution. As the security situation worsened, most foreigners evacuated rural areas and Khartoum, which directly impacted the research design and the researcher’s positionality. The constant sense of uncertainty—described by Calkins (2016:4) as a “limited ability to predict even the immediate future”—became an essential aspect of the research process.¹⁰ Viewing this uncertainty as productive rather than detrimental, as Rivas and Browne (2019:4) suggest, allowed the research to

¹⁰ Calkins' definition primarily elucidates the uncertainty encountered by her Rashaida research participants in her ethnographic study conducted in North-Eastern Sudan. As a non-Sudanese PhD student, I refrain from equating my uncertainty to that experienced by Rashaida Sudanese, for whom uncertainty is intertwined with their daily survival. However, her definition precisely captures the way I experienced uncertainty surrounding my fieldwork in rural areas amidst the Sudanese Revolution.

capture valuable insights into how individuals and organisations navigate crises, offering perspectives that might have otherwise remained unexplored.

A key methodological contribution of this research is the development of categorical violence as an analytical tool, drawing on Tilly's concept of 'categorical inequality'. This concept helps explain how classification systems, such as those used in national labour surveys, reproduce inequalities and marginalisation by devaluing certain types of labour—particularly informal and unpaid work—and those who perform it. These classifications often render some labour invisible or unproductive, despite its direct connection to capitalist production. The sex-typing of labour and restricted access to opportunities based on social categories further underscores the often-overlooked power of classification. This research explores how these dynamics sustain and regenerate broader structures of violence. By focusing on categorical violence, the study moves beyond traditional economic metrics to reveal how violence is embedded within the systems that define and measure work. This shift integrates both qualitative and quantitative data, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of how labour regimes function and perpetuate violence through institutional classifications.

3.1.2 Selection of Case and Sites

3.1.2.1 Case and Site Selection during the Sudanese Revolution

Sudan was chosen as the case study due to my prior involvement in development work, particularly in vocational training, employment generation, and labour market research aimed at peacebuilding and economic development. My familiarity with the country, combined with the availability of some regions that were considered relatively secure at the onset of fieldwork, made Sudan a suitable context for conducting ethnography-inspired research. Addressing issues of risk and insecurity from the research's preparatory phase was crucial to mitigate potential hazards (Cramer, Hammond, and Pottier 2011). Site selection was influenced by the Sudanese Revolution and the rapidly changing security conditions. To mitigate risks, I prioritised selecting rural sites and settling there as quickly as possible. The research process evolved through constant adaptation to challenges, unpredictability, and day-to-day adversities.

My initial criteria for site selection included: (1) a rural post-conflict context; (2) two economically distinct sites; and (3) the presence of VT/EG projects for peacebuilding purposes. The purpose was to compare the socio-economic attributes of two divergent sites, investigate the impact of conflict on rural labour markets, and assess how VT/EG projects influenced labour regime dynamics. I initially planned a contrastive case study (Cramer et al. 2014) involving people from two economically distinct rural sites. This focus on rural areas was grounded in the assumption that rural areas are more vulnerable to violence and conflict, as suggested in economic theories of violence (e.g., Collier et al. 2004). My intention was to choose areas that could be classified as post-conflict settings—places that had experienced violent conflict within the past decade but were relatively stable during fieldwork.

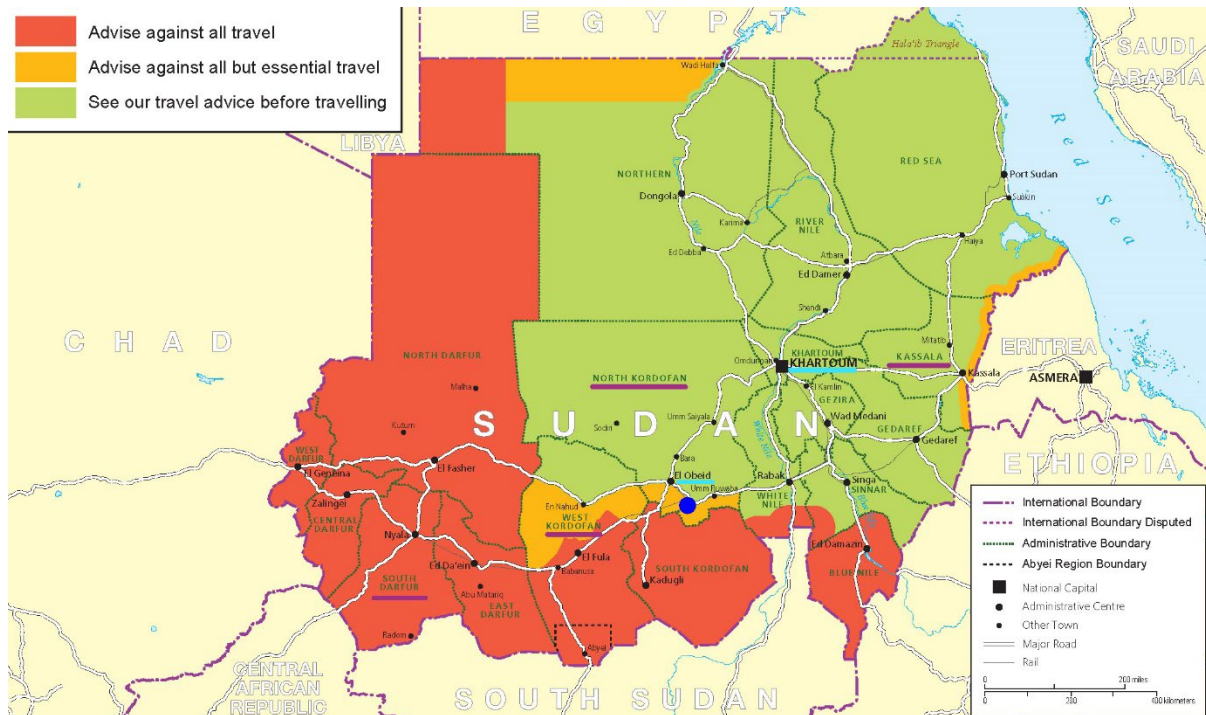
This focus on post-conflict settings was important for examining manifestations of physical violence within labour markets and labour relations (Cramer 2006b). I also aimed to investigate whether VT/EG generation projects contributed positively to both local labour regimes and peacebuilding efforts.

However, it is necessary to revisit the definition of post-conflict settings in the context of a dictatorship or authoritarian state like Sudan. In such contexts, the line between pre- and post-conflict is often blurred, as symbolic, structural, and everyday violence may persist despite the formal cessation of armed conflict. This raises questions about the suitability of the post-conflict label, particularly in regions where authoritarian violence leads to ongoing clashes and instability. Goodhand (2006) argues that conflict often involves not just a breakdown but a reordering of power, and post-conflict reconstruction can embed violence through the very structures meant to promote peace. This suggests that, even in the absence of active conflict, authoritarian regimes may continue to perpetuate various forms of violence, undermining the notion of a true post-conflict phase. While I initially focused on post-conflict settings defined by violent conflict ending within the past 10 years, the notion remains tenuous in areas where conflict resurfaces or where other forms of violence endure. This fluidity required a more nuanced approach to site selection.

Still, I was focused initially on physical violence, and this led me to consider South Darfur and Kassala, and West or North Kordofan. However, the UK Government (see Figure 1) advised against all travel to South Darfur. Consequently, my initial preference for South

Darfur, indicated by the purple underline in the southwest corner of Sudan, had to be abandoned.

Figure 1. Map of Sudan based on the UK Government Travel Advice (2019)



Source: UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Annotated by author

3.1.2.2 ‘Waiting Time’ and State Selection Research in Bahri

To assess the feasibility of conducting preliminary fieldwork in Kassala and North and West Kordofan, I secured a letter of affiliation from the University of Khartoum, facilitated by CEDEJ (Centre d’Études et de Documentation Économiques, Juridiques et Sociales) Khartoum.¹¹ Despite a presidential decree lifting travel restrictions for non-Sudanese, uncertainty about its practical application led me to obtain the letter as a precaution. During the waiting period, I began exploring labour and violence themes through observations in

¹¹ CEDEJ Khartoum, a research organisation sponsored by the French government, maintained a cooperative agreement with the University of Khartoum.

Bahri, a city in Khartoum State, where I stayed with an extended family. This offered valuable insights into the distribution of reproductive labour, the family's internal support systems, and its history of labour and accumulation, contextualising my research on labour regime dynamics in Sudan.

At the same time, protests related to the Sudanese Revolution were escalating, with Shambat, a neighbourhood in Bahari, becoming a key protest site. Observing how residents organised these protests and the security forces' responses—particularly the Rapid Support Force, which I later encountered more closely through some of my interviewees in North Kordofan who had family members in the force—deepened my understanding of the broader socio-political environment and its connection to ethnic categories.

Interviews with government officials and development practitioners in Khartoum revealed that both Kassala and North Kordofan met my research criteria. However, North Kordofan emerged as a more suitable site due to its security situation and the presence of vocational training centres, aligning better with my research goals. Despite its less visible post-conflict status, North Kordofan's history of conflict-related displacement and active vocational training programmes made it a more viable option.

Initially, I viewed North Kordofan as not closely associated with a post-conflict setting. Its governor, Ahmed Haroun—wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes in Darfur—had worked to suppress rebel movements and prevent international access, reinforcing the state's non-conflict image. However, in 2013, conflicts between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) resulted in the displacement of over 31,000 residents from Abu Kershola in South Kordofan, many of whom fled to El-Rahad and Um Rwaba in North Kordofan (WFP 2013) and SPLM factions also came to both rural towns. The relative proximity of this incident made North Kordofan more relevant to my study of violence, including physical violence, and labour regime dynamics.

In terms of VT/EG projects, North Kordofan had several vocational training centres of varying sizes, some of which had already implemented peacebuilding projects in El-Obeid and rural towns through the use of mobile teams and local partners. I was also familiar with the vocational training landscape in the state from previous work. Although the escalation of the Sudanese Revolution led to the abrupt closure of many institutions, including

vocational training centres, these factors solidified my decision to choose North Kordofan as my research site.

3.1.2.3 Preliminary Fieldwork in Kordofan and Racial Categories

After finalising North Kordofan as my case study site, I embarked on preliminary field visits to the rural economic centres of El-Rahad, El-Khowei, and El-Nahoued. During our first visit to El-Rahad, we were confronted by a National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) officer, who questioned us and threatened arrest due to my lack of a travel permit. This led to an enforced waiting period and a short-term stay with local families in El-Obeid. It became evident that the decree lifting travel restrictions held little sway at the local level, highlighting the dysfunction within the Sudanese state and reflecting NISS' growing dissatisfaction with El-Bashir, a sentiment that intensified leading up to his eventual ousting during the Sudanese Revolution (see Section 4.5.3).

During these field visits, I explored rural towns and interviewed key gatekeepers to gauge the feasibility of extended stays. Throughout my research, I observed that racial identities—particularly the 'Arab' and 'African' distinctions—played a significant role in shaping labour relations and labour market access in North Kordofan. These categories, as I use them in this study, are based on how people themselves use these terms and are not tied to a static notion of physical or biological origins. Instead, I examine who chooses to identify as 'Arab' or 'African' (the latter being much less frequently used) to understand the power dynamics behind these self-identified racial categories when they emerge.

Because these identities are self-claimed, they are often fluid and context-dependent, closely tied to ethnic identity, family status, religion, and access to power within rural society. Individuals whose ethnic identities are typically associated with 'African' may emphasise their 'Arab' identity to distance themselves from broader ethnic groups and to assert social privilege. This fluidity underscores the social construction of racial categories, highlighting their non-biological and changeable nature (Fanon 1952; Hall 1980). In Sudan, 'Arab' identity, often linked to descent from the Prophet Muhammad, is associated with higher social status and power (Jok 2007). This identity is reinforced through attributes such as hair texture and skin tone, with straighter hair or lighter skin frequently correlating to

greater social prestige, even among individuals who might otherwise be perceived as 'African' (Hale 2019). In contrast, 'African' identity is linked to darker skin and coarser hair, features associated with lower status and reduced access to power (Sikainga 1996).

These racial categories shaped not only social interactions but also influenced labour market dynamics and the classification of labour. For example, a former teacher with an Arab identity transitioned into a state security role—often linked to Arab identity—after facing tensions with 'African' students. This career shift, facilitated by his 'Arab' family connections, enabled him to exercise greater control over the 'African' population, reinforcing racial power dynamics. Such racialised access to specific professions underscores how labour markets can become sites of racial tension, further entrenching inequality. This aligns with Mamdani's (2002) view that post-colonial states manipulate racial identities to maintain socio-economic hierarchies, using these racialised categories as tools for sustaining structural and symbolic violence.

My preliminary findings highlighted the complexities of conducting research in such a racially charged and highly political environment. Navigating these challenges required careful negotiation with local gatekeepers and security personnel, while remaining mindful of how these dynamics were intertwined with Sudan's broader social hierarchy and labour regime structures. Ultimately, El-Rahad emerged as my primary research site due to its alignment with my research criteria and its potential to provide deeper insights into these racialised labour dynamics. Initially, I also considered El-Nahoued and El-Khowei, but security concerns and their associations with government officials prompted me to focus on El-Rahad, where my connections were more independent and better aligned with my research objectives.

Originally, I planned to compare El-Rahad, a rural site, with El-Obeid, an urban site with more formal wage employment. However, due to security concerns, I reconceptualised El-Rahad Town as a rural town with dynamic economic activity, to be contrasted with Hageina, a nearby village that exhibited less dynamic economic activity.

3.2 Introduction of the Case and Sites

3.2.1 North Kordofan State: The Paucity of Labour Data

North Kordofan is part of the broader Kordofan region in western Sudan, comprising three states—North, South, and West Kordofan. Over time, the region's administrative boundaries have been shaped by various rulers, colonial powers, and post-colonial governments, a process that continued until 1994. Geographically, North Kordofan is bordered by Darfur to the west, White Nile to the east, Northern State to the north, and South Kordofan to the south, fostering a convergence of diverse social dynamics, including 'Arab' and 'African' identities, as well as Islam and Christianity. While most of North Kordofan was classified as 'green' on the UK Government's Travel Advice map (Figure 1), the security classifications were centred around the highway dividing the northern and southern parts of the state. The southern region, due to its proximity to the instability in 'red' South Kordofan, saw towns like El-Rahad, located just south of this divide, uniformly classified as 'orange' (advise against all but essential travel). This highlights a disconnect between external classification systems and local security perceptions (Foucault 1973), where donor frameworks often failed to capture the on-the-ground reality.

North Kordofan, covering an estimated 185,302 square kilometres, is one of Sudan's largest states, and its economy is largely driven by agriculture and pastoral activities. A significant aspect of its economy is gum arabic production, a commodity exempted from the US sanctions list, reflecting its international importance. Sudan was placed under US sanctions in the 1990s due to its links to terrorism and the Darfur humanitarian crisis, which also led to international sanctions from the United Nations and the European Union.

Historical narratives, such as Pallme's (1844) *Travels in Kordofan* to MacMichael's (1912) *The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan*, and Cunnison's (1966) anthropological work *Baggara Arabs: Power and the Lineage in a Sudanese Nomad Tribe*, often highlight the region's struggles during the period of Turko-Egyptian rule, which played a role in catalysing the Mahdist Revolution in the late 19th century. These accounts also emphasise the region's complex tribal diversity. El-Obeid, the state's administrative centre, has historically been a focal point. It initially flourished as the nucleus of the Musabaat kingdom before becoming a crucial hub for the slave trade (Arkeel 1959). Later, during the Turko-Egyptian colonial era, it

served as an important garrison town (Spaulding 2006), strategically linking various parts of Sudan, including Darfur and what is now South Sudan. The town's historical and economic significance highlights North Kordofan's role as a key area within Sudan's broader geopolitical and social fabric.

The socio-economic documentation concerning Kordofan has been constrained by what Oya (2013) terms 'data poverty', where existing surveys and studies provide only partial or fragmented insights into the region's labour dynamics. It was only during the late 1980s, following a drought that impacted the Kordofan region, that donor-funded research initiatives prompted a resurgence in location-specific studies on rehabilitation (Gov of Kordofan and Univ. of Khartoum 1986) and desertification (El Sammani and Abdel Nour 1986). However, the data harnessed for these studies remains partially accessible at best, and more recent studies have been limited in scope.

Several village-level studies have emerged focusing on specific development issues, including nomadism (Beck 1996), pastoral communal land rights (Babiker 2008, 2009), hibiscus production (Komey, Hahnekamp, and Rottenburg 2010), microfinance (Abdalla 2010), and participatory development under authoritarianism (Mahé 2018). These studies enrich our understanding of North Kordofan's socio-economic context, but linking diverse themes to form a cohesive understanding of labour market dynamics in North Kordofan has proven difficult. Labour market data, in particular, remains fragmented, with few comprehensive studies examining larger trends. O'Brien (1983, 1986) explored the intersections of labour and ethnicity in a Gawamaa village in Umm Rwaba locality, while Kevane (1994) investigated rural labour relations within Bireka village in Sheikan locality. Their work sheds light on village-level dynamics, particularly the ways colonial capitalism and social relations around gender and ethnicity have shaped rural labour dynamics and contributed to the gradual emergence of wage labour relations in the region.

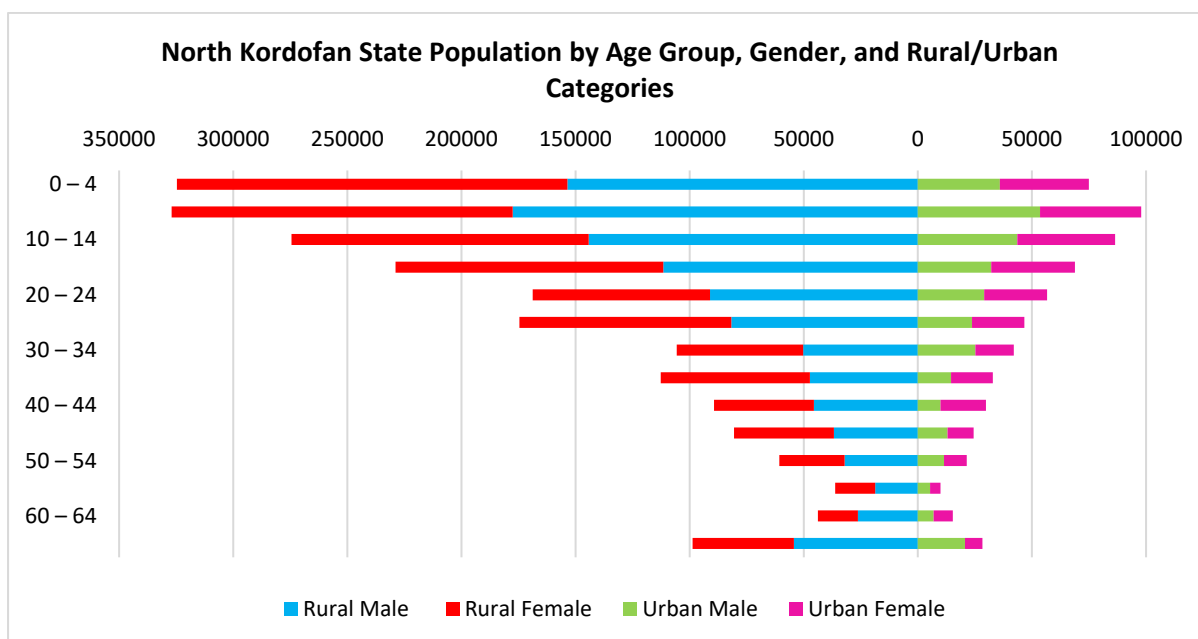
However, the visibility of these labour issues continues to be constrained by the scarcity of government-led socio-economic research initiatives, creating a persistent gap in understanding larger labour market patterns. This data gap not only highlights logistical challenges but also underscores the broader invisibility of Kordofan and its population, particularly in relation to the agricultural and pastoral labour systems central to its economy. The limited recognition of these forms of rural labour reflects broader patterns of

exclusion, where rural economies and labour contributions are overlooked at the national level, contributing to the perpetuation of categorical violence in both political-geographical relations and racial hierarchies (Foucault 1973; Robinson 1983). The scarcity of labour data perpetuates this invisibility, as it reinforces existing inequalities by rendering certain types of work, particularly informal and rural labour, invisible within the larger socio-economic framework.

3.2.1.1 Demography

The only available data on North Kordofan was a limited compilation of raw statistics that I personally negotiated for from the El-Obeid Statistics Office, as no publicly accessible data exists. The dataset was narrow, primarily classified by age, gender, rural/urban distinctions, occupation types based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), and unemployment figures from the 2011 Sudan Labour Force Survey (SLFS) (MoHRDL 2014). Due to minor errors and inconsistencies in the report's calculations, I recalculated and compiled the figures for male and female populations in urban and rural categories. The 2011 population of North Kordofan stood at 2,761,670, with 77% living in rural areas and 23% in urban centres (see Figure 2). The data also indicated a higher concentration of younger age groups, with a gradually declining ageing population.

Figure 2. North Kordofan State Population by Age Group, Gender, and Rural/Urban Categories



Source: SLFS, re-calculated and compiled by author

3.2.1.2 Main Economic Activity Sector

The dataset I obtained, although helpful, reflects the broader issue of ‘data poverty’ in North Kordofan, where the lack of detailed and reliable data limits visibility into the true scope of labour dynamics. As indicated in Table 1, the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector accounts for 66.4% of the total labour force in North Kordofan, with animal production included. However, the absence of a breakdown detailing those engaged in pastoralism or agro-pastoralism—key economic activities in places like El-Rahad—underscores the gaps in this dataset. Trade (9.9%), manufacturing (4.7%), and transportation (4.3%) follow, yet these statistics fail to capture the diverse economic relationships in the region. Furthermore, the recorded ‘zero’ for certain sectors points to an inherent invisibility, where significant portions of the workforce are left unaccounted for.

The amalgamation of agriculture, pastoralism, forestry, and fishing into a single economic activity category, despite their distinct characteristics and labour practices, reflects an external or urban-centric view that fails to acknowledge the diverse and intricate nature of these sectors. In El-Rahad, where such activities are central to the economy, this grouping

flattens the complexity of rural labour dynamics, rendering them as a homogenous entity in statistical data. This misrepresentation stems from the imposition of frameworks that disregard the nuances of rural labour markets, aligning with Mkandawire's (2012) critique of institutional monocropping, in which he argues that external economic models imposed on African contexts often overlook the complexities of local economies, marginalising rural labour realities in the process.

By treating rural labour markets as undifferentiated and distant from the concerns of urban centres, the political economy of knowledge creation perpetuates categorical violence. This form of violence arises when the frameworks used to classify and study labour markets fail to capture the lived realities of those engaged in rural work, reinforcing the invisibility of certain types of labour. As a result, rural labour, although integral to the local economy and society, is marginalised within official data and policy frameworks, reflecting deeper socio-political inequalities at the national level (Mamdani 2002; Robinson 1983).

Table 1. North Kordofan Economic Activity Sector by Gender and Rural/Urban Categories

Economic Activity Sector	Urban			Rural			Total (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	10.1	21.4	12.3	69.3	92.5	78.5	55.6	85.6	66.4
Wholesale and sectoral trade	28.1	16.7	25.9	9.7	1.2	6.3	13.9	2.7	9.9
Manufacturing	14.0	7.1	12.7	4.8	0.0	2.9	6.9	0.7	4.7
Transportation and storage	15.2	4.8	13.2	3.7	0.2	2.3	6.4	0.6	4.3
Education	2.2	21.4	5.9	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.2	4.2	2.9
Construction	10.1	0.0	8.2	2.7	0.0	1.6	4.4	0.0	2.8
Administration, service activities, assistance and support	10.1	4.8	9.1	1.9	0.4	1.3	3.8	0.8	2.7
Mining and quarries	1.1	2.4	1.4	2.7	0.0	1.6	2.3	0.2	1.6
Unspecified activities	2.2	2.4	2.3	0.9	1.8	1.2	1.2	1.8	1.4
Hotels and similar catering services	1.1	2.4	1.4	1.2	0.6	0.9	1.2	0.8	1.0
Human health and social work activities	1.7	11.9	3.6	0.0	1.0	0.4	0.4	2.0	1.0
Other service activities	2.8	2.4	2.7	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.7
Water supply and sanitation, waste management and treatment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Media and Communications	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Financial activities and insurance	0.0	2.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1
Professional, scientific and technical activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Arts, entertainment and creativity	0.6	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Activities of international organizations	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.1
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supplies	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Fixed real estate activities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Government administration, defense and compulsory social insurance	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Family activities of employers for the production of various goods, services and household production for self-consumption	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: SLFS, compiled by author

3.2.1.3 Unemployment

The existing datasets on unemployment in North Kordofan present challenges due to inconsistencies in the figures and classifications, particularly when attempting to triangulate them with other data sources, which still fail to produce a total of 100%. Despite these discrepancies, it is evident from the data that the unemployment rate is higher among the urban population, especially among young people aged 15 to 24, and even more pronounced among young urban females (see Table 2).

This data raises critical questions about the socio-economic factors contributing to high unemployment rates among urban youth, especially females, which the data fails to address. Factors such as educational access, social reproductive labour, social and religious norms, or labour market conditions likely contribute to these trends, but the dataset offers no insight into these socio-economic attributes. Furthermore, the reasons behind the categorisation of more urban youth as unemployed, as compared to their rural counterparts, remain unexplored. These issues, including the limitations of large-scale labour surveys in accurately reflecting the realities of Sudanese labour markets, will be discussed in more detail in Section 7.2, where the politics of knowledge production in labour data collection and its socio-political implications will be critiqued.

Table 2. North Kordofan Youth Unemployment Rate by Gender and Rural/Urban Categories

Age Group	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Youth (15-25)	23.08	57.14	32.08	14.59	11.11	13.13	16.43	16.62	16.50
Mature (25+)	5.23	30.61	11.39	3.04	4.51	3.61	3.57	8.13	5.21

Source: SLFS

3.2.2 The Setting of the Study: An Overview of the El-Rahad Locality

3.2.2.1 Administrative Classifications and Security

El-Rahad, one of the eight localities in North Kordofan, is located in the southeast of the state, bordering South Kordofan to the south (see Figure 3). The map also highlights two other supplementary sites: El-Obeid and Bahri, both marked in yellow. According to a local intellectual, El-Rahad was formerly part of Um Rwaba locality but gained autonomy in 2007, with the reasoning that its economic potential surpassed that of Um Rwaba and that it should retain its tax revenues for local development.¹² However, this change in

¹² Correspondence, Nasr, 11/3/2019.

administrative status went largely unrecognised on official maps, including those used by the UN, until approximately 2021-22.

Due to its relatively recent designation as a locality, official data on El-Rahad is limited and much of the available information comes from donor-funded projects. Although a team of enumerators visited El-Rahad during the 2011 Sudan Labour Force Survey (MoHRDL 2014), locality-level data from this survey has not been made publicly accessible (see Section 7.2 for further details).

Figure 3. North Kordofan State Administrative Map



Source: OCHA Sudan (2021a)

Annotated by author

El-Rahad locality is divided into five administrative units: El-Rahad Town, El-Rahad South, El-Rahad West, El-Rahad North, and El-Rahad East. My fieldwork was conducted across four of these units (Figure 4), excluding El-Rahad South, with the majority of the focus in El-Rahad Town, due to security constraints. This shift from a contrastive approach to one focused on internal variation was a direct result of these security concerns.

The different fieldwork sites within El-Rahad locality allowed for a broad research scope and provided a diverse sample. I also conducted fieldwork in Hageina (El-Rahad West, light blue), Um Laota (El-Rahad North, yellow), Sumayh (El-Rahad East, purple), and the Abu Algor nomads' market, located along the highway (green). El-Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan, is marked in blue for context. Although I did not conduct research in Abu Kershola (marked in pink, situated in South Kordofan), it is highlighted in Figure 4 to indicate its proximity to El-Rahad. In 2013, Abu Kershola experienced violent conflict, resulting in the displacement of its residents, who became internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the El-Rahad area, 74 kilometres away. The journey between the two locations took approximately 17 hours on foot. This displacement significantly impacted the labour dynamics in El-Rahad, while also prompting donor-funded VT/EG projects aimed at peacebuilding in the region (Sections 3.1.2.2 and 3.1.2.3).

Figure 4. Map of El-Rahad Locality Fieldwork Sites and El-Obeid



Source: OCHA (2021b)

Annotated by author

3.2.2.2 Geography, History and People

El-Rahad Town is located about 78 kilometres southeast of El-Obeid, taking approximately one to one and a half hours to reach by road. From Khartoum, the journey to El-Rahad typically takes seven to eight hours on a commercial bus via the old route through Kosti in the White Nile state, or six to seven hours using the newer route via Bara to the north of El-Obeid. Historically, El-Rahad was a crucial railway station that connected western Sudan

with other parts of the country, but its role diminished in the 1980s when the railway ceased to provide passenger services, leaving it mainly for sporadic goods transport.

El-Rahad, derived from Kordofan Arabic, translates to 'water shrine' or 'water fountain', and the town is renowned for its abundant water resources. The primary sources of water in El-Rahad are the man-made lake of *El-Torda*, situated adjacent to the town and shown in emerald in Figure 5 below, and seasonal rivers, known locally as *khor*, flow from east to west along the southern side of the highway. The term El-Torda itself means 'the place where the water comes', as it collects water from the *khor*. Close to El-Torda, is a dense forest that has contributed to the town's distinctive name and the designation of the locality as 'El-Rahad Abu Dakana', distinguishing it from other places named 'Rahad' across Sudan.

El-Rahad's water resources divide the soil into three primary categories (see Figure 5). The first is sandy soil, which is light brown and more common in the northern parts of the locality. The second is *gerdud*, a mix of sand and clay, which is dominant in the central region. The third is greenish-grey clay, which is found mainly near the *khor* and in the southern parts of the locality. Despite these distinctions, El-Rahad is often simplistically described as having *gerdud* soil. The town's water sources and *khor*-based cultivation have led to its classification as a "flood-retreat cultivation zone" (FEWS Net 2013), although in reality, flood-retreat agriculture is limited to the areas near these water bodies. The northern region, by contrast, shares more similarities with the rainfed millet and sesame agro-pastoral zones observed in Bara and Um Dam. These distinct geographical and soil characteristics have a direct impact on the labour dynamics, influencing the agricultural, agro-pastoral, and pastoral activities in the locality.

Figure 5. Satellite Image of the El-Rahad Locality and Fieldwork Sites



Source: Google map (2023)

Annotated by author

El-Rahad is known as the homeland of the Gawamaa tribe, referred to locally as *Dar Gawamaa*. While most of the population identifies as Gawamaa, the locality includes a mix of ethnic groups, illustrating the diversity within the region. Importantly, ethnic identity in this context is socially constructed and gender-specific, with paternal lineage determining ethnic affiliation.

The Gawamaa tribe's name translates to 'gathering', possibly referring to the amalgamation of various smaller tribes (MacMichael 1912). They trace their origins to the Jaalyin, an Arabised Nubian tribe from Northern Sudan, who, according to local accounts, intermingled with African groups, forming the Gawamaa. Primarily sedentary farmers, the Gawamaa grow several cash crops, such as hibiscus, sesame, cotton, various types of sorghum, gum arabic, and subsistence crops. Historically, they were among the first to participate as wage labourers in the Gezira Scheme, a colonial irrigation project located 400 kilometres northeast of El-Rahad (O'Neill and O'Brien 1988).

El-Rahad also has significant historical importance. It played a key role in the Mahdist Revolution (1881-1898) against the Turko-Egyptian rule (1820-1885). Under Sheikh Abu Al-Batool, a key figure of the Gawamaa, resistance forces disrupted Ottoman logistics between El-Obeid and Khartoum and secured a victory in Bara, leading to the capture of El-Obeid. These historical legacies of rebellion remain sources of pride for the people of El-Rahad.

During the 2019 Sudanese Revolution, residents claimed that El-Rahad was perceived as anti-government and pro-revolution due to its historical involvement in uprisings. This reputation contributed to strained relationships between sections of the community and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) government, resulting in frequent confrontations with security forces.

Population estimates for El-Rahad locality vary. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS Net) (2013) estimated the population at 174,224 in 2013. However, Vetcare (2017), a Sudanese NGO, provided a significantly higher estimate, claiming 375,000 inhabitants across the locality's five administrative units. Vetcare also estimated that IDPs made up about 2% of the population, but recalculating with World Food Programme (WFP) (2013) figures suggests this figure might be closer to 8%.

3.2.2.3 Coming to El-Rahad and Travelling to Villages: Continued Struggle with Security Officials

Upon arriving in El-Rahad, I faced continuous challenges with security officials, especially when trying to access the surrounding villages. Initially, my research design aimed to

contrast the dynamic economic activity in El-Rahad with a less economically active village such as Hageina in El-Rahad West. However, once I was settled in El-Rahad Town, the local NISS denied me access to villages beyond the town, despite prior discussions and permissions from both El-Obeid and El-Rahad NISS offices. My gatekeeper intervened and managed to negotiate a conditional agreement: I could visit the villages, but only if I did not stay overnight, and I had to report back to the NISS every three days. Any attempt to challenge these conditions would have been futile, as staying in larger villages like Hageina—where weekly markets and NISS informants were present—would have drawn immediate attention. This experience underscored the intricate dynamics of gaining access to conduct research in regions under strict security measures.

These restrictions posed significant obstacles to the initially planned contrastive study between two economically distinct sites. The absence of daily public transportation between El-Rahad and the surrounding villages required me to rely on private transport, hiring taxis for entire days to complete the journeys. While this arrangement might have worked for occasional visits, it was not sustainable for regular travel during my fieldwork.

In light of these logistical and security constraints, I shifted my research focus from a contrastive study to an internal analysis of variation within El-Rahad locality, concentrating specifically on El-Rahad Town. Despite these limitations, my fieldwork across three villages and the weekly nomadic market expanded the research scope and offered a more diverse sample, revealing unique labour dynamics across these locations. Socio-economic profiles of the villages studied are included in Appendix 1.

3.2.3 El-Rahad Town: Labour History, Neighbourhoods and Households

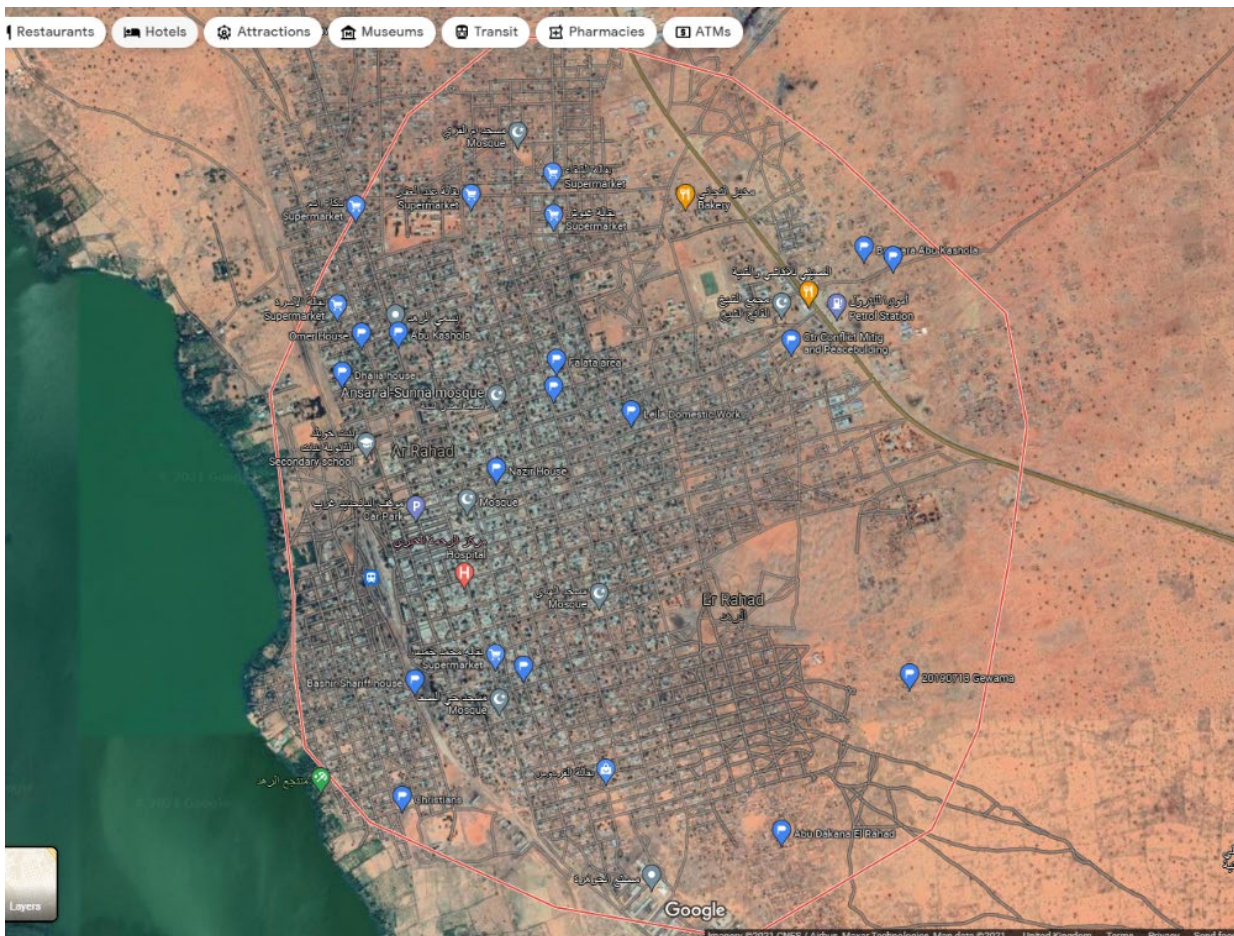
This section examines El-Rahad's labour history and social structures, with a focus on the local 'bourgeoisie' and the town's key neighbourhoods. El-Rahad, as a traditional trade hub, links small-scale producers of sesame, hibiscus, sorghum, and livestock to larger traders who, despite international sanctions, export these goods globally. Mahmoud (1984) identified El-Rahad as one of four case studies on the Sudanese bourgeoisie in Western Sudan. In 1976, she noted the town's involvement in gum arabic trade, which later declined due to price volatility. El-Rahad also played a part in the early edible oil pressing industry,

established in the 1920s (Mahmoud 1984:83), and a sesame-based sweet factory on the outskirts offered local employment.

Mahmoud (1984:83–84) noted the absence of taxis and the use of animal-drawn carts in 1976 El-Rahad. Nearly 50 years on, donkey carts remain common, with occasional rickshaws appearing as taxis. The upper class now own a small number of vehicles. While amenities like running water, electricity, secondary schools, and a hotel were available in 2019, access to water and electricity was limited to specific days and hours, and only in certain areas.

Mahmoud (1984:84) described El-Rahad as a place where “simple co-existence between the modern and traditional sectors” prevailed, sustained by the steady flow of agricultural goods from small producers to factories and trade companies. As outlined in Chapter 4, the northern traders' quarter, known as *zariba*, was bustling, with hibiscus and sesame cleaned, sorted, and packaged for export. Mahmoud's (1984:84) research revealed that six capitalists controlled the town's commercial and industrial sectors and the surrounding villages. Five were from the Jaalyin tribe in northern Sudan and the sixth, of Turkish origin, was married to a Jaalyin woman from a trading family. All were descendants of traders who had started traditional oil pressing in the 1920s and 1930s.

Figure 6. Satellite Image of El-Rahad Town



Source: Google map (2021)

Annotated by author

The expansion of El-Rahad Town coincided with the growth of its labour-related activities. Initially confined to an area of approximately three-square kilometres, encompassing the market and zariba, the town gradually expanded to cover around fifteen square kilometres (Figure 6). This growth was spurred by a combination of economic migration and forced displacement from rural areas, shaping the town's geographical extent over time.

El-Rahad Town is divided into several neighbourhoods, each distinct in terms of the ethnicity and socio-economic class of its primary residents (see Figure 7 for the names of these neighbourhoods, indicated in green).

area was primarily inhabited by the Fallata and Hausa, who worked as wage labourers for the affluent families.

Towards the northern side of the town, the zariba was situated close to the highways, serving as a hub for concentrated commercial and industrial activities. Further north, the Zaghawa, Shanabla, Messiria, and newly arrived IDPs lived in traditional houses made from dried vegetation such as *dokhon* (millet) and *um chico*, forming scattered settlements. Continuing southward along the shores of El-Torda, a recently constructed 'resort' commissioned by a wealthy NCP member stood apart from the rest of the town, charging an entry fee of 30 SDG, comparable to Khartoum prices. This resort featured a concrete structure, modern toilet facilities, and a café with outdoor seating.

On the western edge of El-Rahad lies the manmade lake, El-Torda. The prime locations nearby were owned by prominent families of Jaalyin or Gawamaa origins. Neighbourhoods adjacent to El-Torda, like El-Shatty, were home to residents of the Nuba, Baggara, and South Sudanese groups. Many South Sudanese residents preferred living near the water, explaining that their daily water needs exceeded what the unreliable public water supply could meet.

Further out, the Abu Dakana neighbourhood housed less affluent residents, including newly arrived Gawamaa people from rural villages and IDPs from Abu Kershola. The IDPs, who arrived in May 2013 under dire circumstances, initially settled in this area due to restrictions imposed by the local NISS. Without support from international humanitarian agencies, and with state governor Haroun refusing to allow an official IDP camp in the town, this humanitarian crisis largely went unnoticed. Some financially stable IDPs were able to construct homes in the town centre, but most remained in poor conditions. My gatekeeper guided me to Abu Dakana for research, likely due to the concentration of IDPs and the area's reputation as 'lower-class'. However, as my research deepened, I found that the residents, while facing challenges, did not represent the poorest segment of the population.

3.2.3.1 Household Dynamics

Houses in El-Rahad, at first glance, appear like typical homes found elsewhere. However, a closer examination reveals that these individual houses are discreetly connected through hidden doors or windows, often located in kitchens or deep in the garden, linking households together. Social dynamics within these interconnected homes diverge from conventional notions of households, which traditionally rely on two key concepts: the 'household dwelling' concept (based on physical cohabitation) and the 'housekeeping' concept (involving shared resources and a common budget) (UN 2017). In El-Rahad, although houses appear to be separate units, they are subtly linked, creating a network that extends beyond individual dwellings. As such, the household dwelling concept fails to fully capture the reality of El-Rahad, where social and economic connections loosely bind multiple homes, blurring the lines of conventional definitions.

To understand these household dynamics, especially the broader concept of the housekeeping concept, it is important to reference Sen's (1987) family economics model, which addresses gender dynamics and cooperative conflicts within households. Sen's model assumes that household members naturally cooperate to enhance overall resources. He suggests that "decision-making in the family tends to take the form of the pursuit of cooperation" (2003:323). This assumption recognises that men and women have distinct interests within family dynamics, and each member stands to lose considerably if cooperation breaks down, leading to the adoption of various cooperative solutions to ensure relative gains for each party.

However, as my research progressed, I realised that even an expanded interpretation of the housekeeping concept does not align with the actual dynamics of households in El-Rahad. While Sen's concept emphasises collective decision-making and cooperative dynamics as key features, I observed significant tension within households, and there was little that could be described as collective or cooperative about the relationships. These tensions challenge the idea that households function as cohesive economic units. I will explore this further in later chapters, focusing on the dynamics of labour, particularly social reproductive labour, the valuation of labour, and labour market access.

3.2.4 Research Questions

This research aimed to investigate the intersection of social structure and hierarchies in shaping the meaning and classification of labour, as well as labour market access, and understanding the functioning of rural labour regimes. This intersection is examined in the context of Arabisation and Islamisation, the historical processes of exploitation and domination, the family-based accumulation of power and exclusion, and the institutional neglect at the international level of locally specific conceptions of work. By identifying labour-related harms and exploitation and their root causes, this research tries to understand how forms of violence are created, sustained, and regenerated through labour classification, labour market access, and wider labour regime dynamics. The main question framing this research, therefore, is:

How are labour market and labour regime dynamics implicated in the process of maintaining and regenerating violence?

This central question opens further inquiries into several key areas:

- How do historical patterns of exploitation and domination continue to influence labour regime dynamics in El-Rahad?
- What roles do social memberships and hierarchies play in classifying and valuing work and regulating the labour market access of varied social groups?
- How are policy-level institutional frameworks surrounding labour and employment generation embedded within the broader social dynamics in Sudan?
- How do donor-funded peacebuilding interventions, particularly those involving training, contribute to employment generation in local labour markets, and how does that employment generation support peacebuilding within the context of structural violence?

By addressing these interconnected questions, the research examines the ways in which violence—whether structural, symbolic, everyday, or physical—and the critical role of categorical violence through acts of classification, are embedded in and perpetuated by local labour markets and their associated power relations.

3.3 Researching Rural Sudan: Methodology

3.3.1 Research Design and Methods

In this research, the aim was to capture the fluid, nuanced, and multiple labour regime dynamics among individuals and social groups, particularly those often overlooked by large-scale national surveys due to their work not aligning with standard classifications. As a result, the research adopted a relational perspective, focusing on the role of the social (Fine 1998)—including social relations, hierarchies, and networks—in shaping both labour regime dynamics and forms of violence. Drawing on Vigh's (2011) relational understanding of violence and Tilly's (1999) notion of categorical inequality, this approach recognises that violence, whether manifesting as unrecognition or lack of labour access, is deeply embedded in social structures. By examining labour and violence through this relational lens, the study seeks to understand how social relations influence work and perpetuate different forms of violence.

The research utilised a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative case studies with a quantitative survey. While traditional labour studies often rely on quantitative designs, typically based on large-scale national surveys, this study integrated both methodologies to offer a more comprehensive analysis. The questionnaire-based survey facilitated basic quantitative analysis, which is discussed further in Section 3.3.4. Qualitative research, involving in-depth engagement with individuals, was also used as it is particularly effective at uncovering complex issues, processes, and patterns within real-world contexts. Schmidt (2007) notes that small-scale case studies are ideal for identifying patterns of practice, rather than validating hypothesised connections among quantifiable variables. In particular, life histories were used to explore the historical and social dimensions to patterns of labour-related exploitation. Cramer and Sender (2022) have employed life histories as a tool to reveal the nuanced realities of women's lives and labour, showing how this method can uncover subjective experiences and the intricate interplay of economic hardship, social norms, and gendered labour relations that are often missed by quantitative research.

The qualitative approach, enriched by ethnographic observations (Grabska 2014), interviews, and life histories, allows for a deep exploration of the diverse dynamics within rural labour markets. It is important to note that the goal of this case study was not to

generalise findings but to uncover the intricate diversity within rural labour markets and labour relations. To complement the qualitative methods, a survey was conducted in El-Rahad, which, when combined with life histories, interviews, and observation, helped link broader labour patterns to specific individual experiences. This mixed approach allowed for both broader statistical insights and a deeper understanding of the lived realities of individuals within the labour regime.

The research also included policy analysis, reviewing the 2011 Sudan Labour Force Survey (SLFS) and VT/EG projects in Sudan. An extensive review of primary and secondary sources, including archival research conducted in Khartoum and London, provided critical historical context. Interviews with policymakers and development practitioners in Khartoum, El-Obeid, and El-Rahad added depth to the analysis, offering valuable perspectives on peacebuilding initiatives and institutional dynamics.

3.3.2 Sampling Strategy

To address the dynamics of work and employment often neglected by large-scale survey-based labour studies, this research employed a deliberate sampling strategy. The primary goal was to capture the various nuances within El-Rahad locality, with a particular focus on El-Rahad Town and distinct social groups identified through preliminary research. Over-sampling was deemed necessary to include individuals traditionally overlooked in socio-economic studies and to comprehensively document patterns of violence among marginalised rural workers. Informed by socio-economic studies across various social groups distinguished by gender, ethnicity (which was closely tied to racial distinctions), occupation, and residential areas, I recognised that the neighbourhoods within El-Rahad Town exhibited notable distinctions and were rarely homogenous. Insider perceptions often linked each neighbourhood to particular class and ethnic backgrounds, suggesting that both ethnicity and class shaped the social dynamics of these areas. To effectively reach the specific groups under investigation, a combination of sampling methods, tailored to the research's target demographic, was employed.

Primarily, this study used purposive venue-based variation sampling, structured around neighbourhoods and major workplaces. Venue-based sampling, in this context, refers to the

deliberate selection of different types of workplaces and neighbourhoods as venues for data collection, particularly for reaching groups that are hard to access through conventional sampling techniques (Muhib et al. 2001). For instance, sampling was conducted at various sites of work such as hospitals, the zariba (trading quarter) and its agricultural processing ground, farms, markets, streets, nomads' herding grounds, craftsmen's places, as well as people's houses as key sites of work where people were engaged in various labour. This approach allowed me to target key venues associated with different ethnic and occupational groups, offering insight into the diversity and internal variations within El-Rahad's labour regimes. The diversity of their work can be seen in Figure 12 in Chapter 5. In many cases, specific workplaces were linked to certain ethnic groups, and the sampling aimed to reflect the ethnic diversity within the labour force. By moving across venues in different neighbourhoods, I was also able to account for different social hierarchies. This venue-based variation sampling was essential to reflect the intricate diversity within El-Rahad's labour market dynamics, as these social differentials were presumed to influence labour relations and market outcomes. This approach compensated for the lack of reliable official data on socio-economic and occupational groups at the locality level.

Snowball sampling was employed for participants involved in VT/EG projects, a specific target group. This method allowed for the identification of additional project participants through their social networks (Abbott and McKinney 2012), aligning with the research's emphasis on understanding social networks among both training providers and participants. Snowball sampling was also used for certain occupational groups where venue-based sampling at workplaces was feasible but not socially appropriate. For instance, tea ladies, who are highly visible in the market, were approached using this method to establish trust and safety among participants (Schmidt 2007). This approach facilitated deeper engagement with individuals who might have been hesitant to participate at their workplace but were more comfortable in a private setting, such as their home.

3.3.3 'Family' and 'Residential Units' Rather than 'Households'

The official definition and classification of 'households' have been widely debated across various academic disciplines (Akresh and Edmonds 2010; O'Laughlin 1995). The

conventional understanding of households, as defined by the UN (2017), typically assumes cohabitation and shared economic factors, often rooted in the idea of a shared budget (Sen 1987). Despite the universal use of this concept as an enumeration unit in surveys (van de Walle 2016), evidence from various disciplines suggests that the household, as defined for statistical purposes, may differ significantly from the social unit in which individuals actually live (Randall, Coast, and Leone 2011:217).

In the early stages of research, I observed that even within what are traditionally referred to as households, physical connections—such as discreetly placed doors or windows—facilitated exchanges of goods, services, and care between kin and non-kin. This architecture demonstrated that ‘households’ extended beyond those physically residing together. In Sudan, it became evident that the concept of a household accommodating non-residents was common, as individuals who did not live in the same dwelling were still integral to the extended family unit.

As a result, sampling was based on clearly distinguishable residential units (RUs) rather than conventional household definitions (Cramer et al. 2014). In their Fair Trade, Employment and Poverty Reduction (FTEPR) project conducted in rural Ethiopia and Uganda, Cramer et al. (2014:177) defined an RU as “any structure in which at least one person was sleeping”, an inclusive approach aimed at capturing individuals often missed by household surveys, such as migrants (Breman 2010:135). In El-Rahad, this approach ensured that no housing structure or individual was overlooked because of their divergence from conventional household definitions.

As the research progressed, the concept of RUs evolved into the more intricate notion of ‘family’, enriching its connotations. This shift allowed for a deeper exploration of social networks and hierarchies that extended beyond physical dwellings, revealing how social networks influenced labour regime dynamics and resource allocation. This approach also uncovered the dynamics of intra-household inequality and power struggles, as well as the influence of broader agencies and dynamics that transcend kin-based relationships, often referred to as “supra-household or non-kin based agencies” (Kandiyoti 1999:4).

3.3.4 Developing the Research Questionnaire

The research questionnaire was developed with the dual purpose of addressing the central research question and exploring the nuanced forms of work often overlooked by national surveys due to their rigid economic classifications. Bakewell (2008) highlights the distinction between policy-driven categories and those that emerge from individuals' fluid experiences. This distinction guided the questionnaire's design, aiming to avoid relying solely on policy categories. Instead, it sought to uncover potential discrepancies between formal classifications and real-life experiences through the use of life histories and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire design was influenced by longstanding critiques from feminist political economists and labour regime theorists, who emphasise the need to recognise the productive value of social reproductive work and informal work, often overlooked in conventional labour classifications (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 1975; Fraser 2013; Standing 2011).

To avoid these limitations, the research incorporated time-use inquiries in the questionnaire, exploring how individuals allocate their time daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. The time-use method (Bryson 2007; Charmes 2019) is particularly effective in highlighting the often-overlooked realm of unpaid reproductive work, primarily carried out by women and girls. Furthermore, by looking beyond a single reference week, the questionnaire captured how work patterns change over the year, offering insights into the relationship between work, social calendars, and seasonal variations.

To maintain accessibility while ensuring depth, the questionnaire included phrasing and questions from established surveys. This balance aimed to make the content understandable for respondents while covering key topics. The FTEPR questionnaire (Cramer et al. 2017) was particularly valuable, enabling the inclusion of questions that reveal the relational dimensions of work. An example is the question, "Have you had to pay someone or give something to obtain work?"—a type of inquiry absent from Sudan's national surveys, such as the SLFS. Incorporating these nuanced response options allowed for more candid discussions on the relationships between family dynamics, social networks, and labour. While the SLFS (MoHRDL 2014) was referenced for its familiarity with the local language, especially Arabic terms for houses and consumption, it primarily served as a

foundation for tailoring the questionnaire. These terms were adapted to fit the dialect and context specific to North Kordofan, ensuring relevance to the local setting.

3.3.5 Information on the Research Participants

3.3.5.1 Location and Gender

The data collection process included interviews with 354 participants, conducted individually and/or in groups across El-Rahad, El-Obeid, and Bahri. This number also accounts for two individuals interviewed during preliminary fieldwork in El-Nahoud and two Sudanese expatriates living in Oman. Participants were engaged through both focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Additionally, family members who were present during interviews, even if only observing due to age or other factors, contributed demographic and work-related information, including children who were both observed and interviewed.

Furthermore, these 354 participants offered insights into 91 family members not physically present (see Table 3). This diverse participant pool included a range of individuals, from local community members to policymakers and donor representatives, with the latter group primarily based in Khartoum and El-Obeid.

During my fieldwork, I stayed with five extended families across El-Rahad, El-Obeid, and Bahri. These extended stays allowed me to observe and participate in daily routines, particularly reproductive work, thereby enriching my understanding of family labour dynamics and histories within these communities.

Table 3. Participants by Gender and Location

	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met
Location/Type	Female		Male		Total	
El-Rahad town/Abu Algor Individuals	71	38	77	39	148	77
El-Rahad Groups	7	0	7	0	14	0
El-Rahad Total	78	38	84	39	162	77
Um Laota Individuals	13	1	9	1	22	2
Hageina Individuals	4	0	3	0	7	0
Sumayh Individuals	0	0	3	0	3	0
Sumayh Groups	16	0	6	0	22	0
El-Rahad Total	111	39	105	40	216	79
El-Obeid Individuals	16	1	26	1	42	2
El-Obeid Groups	4	0	2	0	6	0
El-Obeid Total	20	1	28	1	48	2
Khartoum Individuals (including policymakers)	23	4	40	6	63	10
Khartoum Groups	17	0	6	0	23	0
Khartoum Total	40	4	46	6	86	10
El-Nahoued	0	0	2	0	2	0
Muscat, Oman	1	0	1	0	2	0
Sub-Total	172	44	182	47	354	91
Grand Total	445					

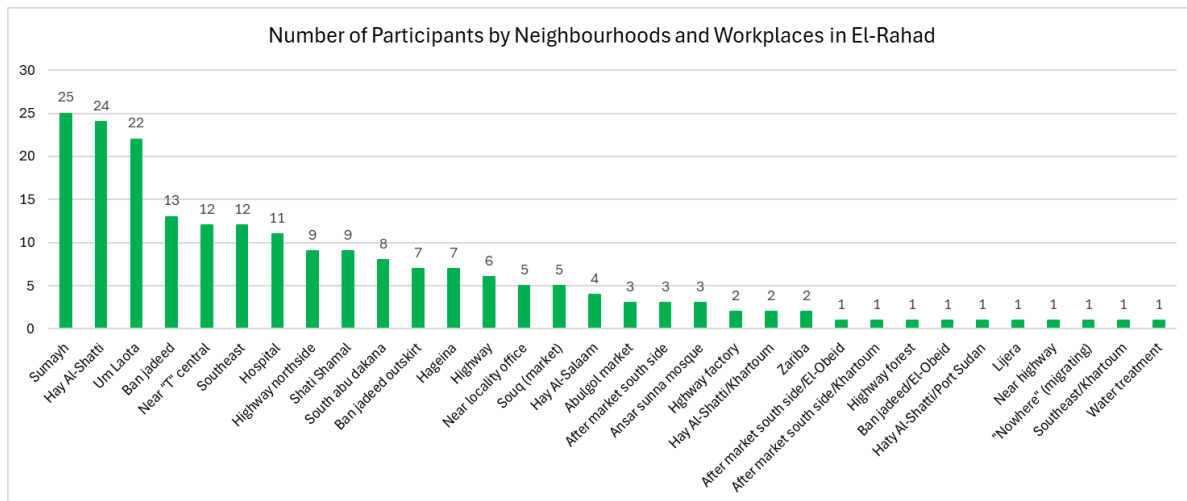
In El-Rahad locality, which includes El-Rahad Town, Um Laota, Hageina, and Sumayh, 216 individuals participated in in-person interviews. To enrich the research with a broader range of perspectives, particularly from academics and policymakers, additional interviews were conducted with 48 individuals in El-Obeid and 86 in Bahri. These interviews aimed to capture the broader dynamics surrounding labour markets, labour relations, and the management and impact of vocational training on employment generation and peacebuilding as well as exploring how labour data is collected and vocational training is implemented and managed. Of all in-person participants, the gender distribution was 172 females and 182 males, providing a balanced range of insights.

El-Rahad served as the principal research site, with a sampling methodology designed to capture internal variation (see Section 3.3.2). A total of 204 participants (excluding young children from the total number of 216 interviewed) engaged in various forms of labour were interviewed across more than 32 workplaces, neighbourhoods, and villages in El-Rahad locality. In El-Rahad Town alone, data was collected from 29 distinct workplaces, including a hospital, market, and iron factory (noted as “near locality office”), as well as from

neighbourhoods such as Hay Al-Shatti and Ban Jadeed. This approach ensured representation from diverse worker groups.

Figure 8 below summarises participant distribution across El-Rahad neighbourhoods and workplaces. In addition, participants who had migrated to urban areas, such as El-Obeid and Khartoum, were marked accordingly. One participant was classified as ‘nowhere’ (migration) in line with Breman’s (1996) concept of individuals without fixed residence, who, in Sudan’s case, move in search of work or a safe location away from government surveillance. This fluidity in participant locations highlights the dynamic nature of residence as discussed in Section 3.3.3.

Figure 8. Number of Participants by El-Rahad Neighbourhoods and Workplaces

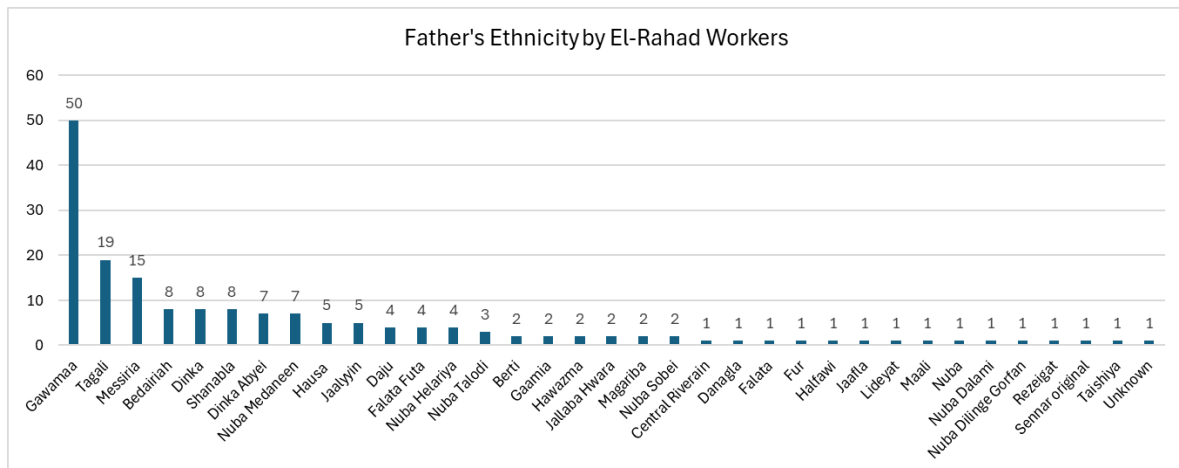


The focus on internal variation facilitated the collection of labour information across 35 ethnic groups, including one unidentified group, within El-Rahad locality. Ethnic identification relied on self-declaration and considered only paternal lineage, aligning with the common Sudanese practice, particularly among ‘Arab’ groups, where ethnic identities are often inherited through the father’s line (Deng 1995). Ethnicity, being a social construct (Barth 1998), holds significant implications for social networks and institutional dynamics.

Figure 9 below displays the ethnic composition of 174 El-Rahad workers. In some group discussions or interviews, ethnic identity was not sought, resulting in a lower number of respondents. While the participant sample does not mirror the full ethnic diversity of El-Rahad Town or El-Rahad locality due to the focused scope of research sites, it nonetheless captures the essential characteristics of local ethnic groupings. Notably, the Gawamaa

group, native to El-Rahad, had the highest representation among participants. The Tagali group had the second-highest representation, reflecting the substantial presence of IDPs from Abu Kershola, South Kordofan, which was a targeted group for this study.

Figure 9. Ethnic Identities of El-Rahad Workers



This study does not seek to generalise residential or social patterns in El-Rahad Town or the locality. However, examining neighbourhoods by social groups, such as ethnicity and migration history within these groups, reveals that proximity to the town centre and access to public services (e.g., water and electricity) often signify a degree of power among residents. Table 4 summarises interviewees' gender and ethnic memberships within El-Rahad.

Even within major ethnic groups such as the Gawamaa and Messiria, which are distributed across different neighbourhoods, social hierarchies and local power dynamics can be reflected in their residential locations. For example, newly arrived or displaced Gawamaa and Messiria often reside on the town's outskirts, while those with a longer history in town, and established social and labour connections, tend to live closer to the centre in more stable housing. These dynamics are further examined in Section 7.3.3, where I compare female residents' socio-economic backgrounds and labour roles, including the influence of their residential settings.

In addition to the participant demographics, a detailed discussion of the occupational groups among El-Rahad participants can be found in Section 5.3.1, alongside Figure 12, Self-Declared Work Classification by Gender. Further analysis of the social backgrounds of Kordofan participants, their methods of securing employment, and the links to wage inequality is presented in Section 6.4.1. This includes Figure 17, Sources of Income Inequality: Average Wage Level by Social Profiles and Wasta Types in El-Rahad and El-Obeid.

3.3.5.2 Age Group

The age distribution of all individual (not group) participants is presented in Table 5. The largest age group was those aged 35 to 44, followed by 25–34-year-olds, 15-24s, and 45-54s. I encountered a challenge when collecting age information from participants, particularly in El-Rahad, as a significant number were unsure of their exact ages and had to consult family members or calculate their ages based on significant life events. In some cases, I had doubts about the accuracy of the ages provided by participants.

Table 5. Age Group (Individuals)

	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met
Age group	Female		Male		Total	
0-4	7	1	3	3	10	4
5-14	13	11	11	6	24	17
15-24	25	10	21	12	46	22
25-34	28	6	25	11	53	17
35-44	30	7	41	5	71	12
45-54	15	7	24	4	39	11
55-64	7	0	21	2	28	2
65-74	3	1	12	2	15	3
75-84	0	0	2	1	2	1
85-94	0	0	1	0	1	1
Over 110	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	128	43	161	47	289	91
Grand Total						380

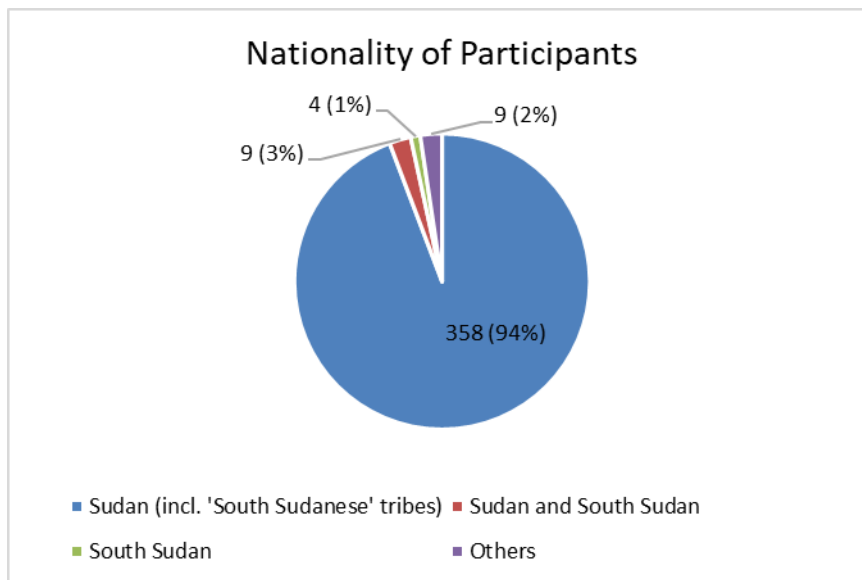
In addition, many participants could not recall their exact birthdays or had difficulty in determining them. Interestingly, a considerable number of older participants shared the same birthday of 1st January, a legacy of the British colonial era when children's ages were

determined by their height and a uniform birthday of 1st January was assigned. This phenomenon is often referred to as 'the January Children', a term used to describe the generation born during the Anglo-British Condominium period in Sudan (Elhillo 2017). The prevalence of participants declaring 1st January as their birthday suggests that this colonial practice may have persisted in rural North Kordofan until relatively recently.

3.3.5.3 Nationality

Of the 380 individuals whose information was collected, 358 (94%) identified themselves as Sudanese. This group included individuals of South Sudanese origin, such as Dinka and Nuer, and two individuals with dual nationality (Chad and Canada). In addition, nine participants (2.4%) identified as both Sudanese and South Sudanese, four (1%) identified solely as South Sudanese, and nine others had diverse nationalities, including international development workers and economic migrants from Europe, Asia, and other parts of Africa (see Figure 11).

Figure 10. Nationality of Participants



3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research methodology and case selections were shaped by the volatile security situation during the fieldwork period. Consequently, the research design had to adapt to constraints, uncertainties, and the presence of everyday violence. Throughout the process, various research design, methodological, and practical challenges became clearer, and adjustments had to be made to the original case study approach to fit the prevailing security context. This required flexibility and a willingness to adapt to changing circumstances.

A significant challenge encountered was the lack of reliable labour data in Kordofan, which exemplifies the broader issue of categorical violence. The absence of accurate data perpetuates the invisibility of certain groups and forms of labour, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Categorical violence operates by excluding marginalised workers from official classifications, devaluing their contributions, and reinforcing social inequalities. As a researcher, the absence of data on places like El-Rahad highlighted how rural regions are marginalised within the history of knowledge production and power in Sudan. Even as a former development worker, passing through El-Rahad numerous times, I had no knowledge of the town's significance, despite it hosting large numbers of IDPs from Abu Kershola. This gap in knowledge—and the town's invisibility in humanitarian discourse—exposed the limits of perception that I held, revealing how the categories used in development work shape and limit what we see.

Reflecting on my previous positionality, categorical violence made me confront the constraints of traditional development frameworks. The categories we often use in policy work, development, and even quantitative research, compel us to accept certain limitations in understanding complex realities. This research seeks to mitigate the impact of these rigid classifications by incorporating more qualitative methods—such as life histories, ethnographic observations, and in-depth interviews—allowing for a more nuanced understanding of labour, power, and social relations in regions like El-Rahad. At the same time, conducting quantitative analysis forced me to engage in categorisation, and I became acutely aware of the tension between the need for visible, quantifiable data and the exclusionary power of categories. The desire for visible numbers and data conflicted with my critique of the categorical inequalities that these same classifications often perpetuate.

In this context, alternative forms of categorisation and methodological flexibility carry radical implications. They not only challenge the structures that make certain groups and forms of work invisible but also allow for a broader inclusion of voices and lived realities often missing from official records. Conducting research in such a conflict-affected and volatile context as Sudan deepened my understanding of the intricate relationships between work, social dynamics, and violence. The adaptive approach taken throughout this research underscores the importance of flexibility, open-mindedness, and a willingness to confront one's own positionality when conducting research in complex and dynamic environments.

Chapter 4 Historicising Labour, Social Change, and Violence in Sudan

4.1 Introduction

The role of historical context in shaping social dynamics and state formation has often been overlooked in development studies, despite calls to better integrate history into analyses of African development (Hawkins 2017). Bernstein (1988) emphasises how colonial interactions shaped enduring inequalities in developing countries by imposing labour structures that continue to influence contemporary markets, as seen in Sudan's history of slavery and exploitation. Lerche (2022) highlights the persistence of unfree labour and social reproduction, noting their continued impact on labour relations and transitions toward capitalism in agrarian settings. Acemoglu et al. (2001) argue that colonial institutions have had a long-lasting impact on state formation and economic inequalities, which continue to shape development outcomes in formerly colonised countries. Bayly et al. (2020) further highlight how colonialism and global historical processes have influenced the evolution of state systems and labour regimes, with colonial and contemporary systems interconnected in shaping economic structures. These insights help contextualise the labour dynamics and historical inequalities in regions like El-Rahad. Scholars such as Tilly (2006) and Duffield and Hewitt (2009) have highlighted the profound impact of historical forces, including but not limited to colonialism, on the development of labour systems and state formation. This chapter explores how historical patterns of exploitation and domination—both colonial and non-colonial—have deeply influenced labour regime dynamics and social relations in Sudan.

The concept of categorical inequalities (Tilly 1999) is crucial to understanding how both indigenous and colonial forms of exploitation have persisted in Sudan. Tilly's notion of categorical pairs—such as 'masters' and 'slaves' or 'big traders' and 'wage workers'—reflects how racial and ethnic hierarchies have historically structured power. These pairs, often embodied by lighter-skinned Northern elites as 'masters' and darker-skinned Sudanese as 'slaves', illustrate how certain groups monopolised economic and political power through mechanisms like exploitation and opportunity hoarding.

Hasan (1973) highlights how Arabisation and Islamisation from the seventh century onwards entrenched ethnic divisions and social stratification, which local elites used to control labour

and resources. During the Ottoman Empire period, Ewald (1990) shows that the rise of merchant capitalism intensified exploitation, with Arab Muslim traders controlling both slaves and soldiers, using military power to expand the slave trade and reinforce racial hierarchies, marginalising darker-skinned Sudanese as slaves and wage workers. Sikainga (1996) further illustrates how, following the decline of slavery, ex-slaves increasingly became wage labourers, particularly in agricultural and domestic sectors, deepening racial distinctions within Sudan's labour systems.

While Sudan's history is often marked by the visible violence engendered by soldiers—as Willis (2023) observes, “Sudan's entire history has been dominated by soldiers and the violence and corruption they bring”—another layer of violence exists in its labour history. Labour-based violence occurred both visibly and invisibly, through the exploitation of marginalised groups and categorical violence. This chapter explores how physical, structural, and symbolic violence, often tied to racial, ethnic, and gender categories, perpetuated social inequalities, devalued certain forms of labour, and shaped access to labour markets in Sudan's complex labour regimes.

In addition to these forms of violence, the chapter also examines the impact of economic and labour policymaking, particularly during the 1989-2019 rule of the National Islamic Front (NIF)/National Congress Party (NCP). Young (2017) argues that both racial and ethnic, and structural explanations of Sudan's turmoil overlook the intellectual environment that shaped policymaking during the mid-20th century. By situating development policies within their historical context, this chapter shows how long-standing social dynamics have influenced institutional arrangements, reinforcing inequalities in labour dynamics.

Understanding Sudan's labour regimes and the violence embedded within them requires a perspective that goes beyond colonialism to include indigenous forms of exploitation, as well as the institutional policymaking that has perpetuated these systems. By linking categorical inequalities and labour dynamics, the chapter illustrates how historical patterns of exploitation and marginalisation continue to shape labour regimes and reinforce social hierarchies, particularly in regions like Kordofan.

4.2 Primitive Accumulation through Slavery, Feudalism and Arabisation/Islamisation

4.2.1 The Rise of Enslaved Labour: Pharaonic Nubia (2300BC – 350AD)

One of the earliest institutionalised labour practices, which had enduring ramifications for the configuration of labour and subsequent labour regimes in Sudan, was the institution of slavery during the era of pharaonic Nubia under Egyptian dominion. Egyptian pharaohs conducted raids on Nubian kingdoms situated along the Nile Valley (Manzo 2017), primarily in lower Nubia (Adams 1977:21), for four primary purposes: to forestall Nubian incursions, secure access to gold mines, ensure a steady influx of slaves, and establish trade networks (Ḥasan 1973:3).

Xenophobia was pervasive within pharaonic Egypt, and the enslavement of Nubians (Lobban 2003:214) as well as people with darker skin living south of Nubia (Redford 2006:9–10) was rationalised by Egyptians. Given that 'Nubian' means bronzed or burnt in Greek (Redford 2006:5–6), skin colour was employed as a means of characterisation and categorisation. Nubians and other groups of people from present-day Sudan were taken as slaves to Egypt to work on the construction of pyramids and monuments, with their labour being viewed as a form of tribute to the pharaohs. Pharaonic Egypt's policy of extracting the maximum possible natural and human resources from Nubia and its surroundings spurred the influx of Egyptians into Nubia. This process laid the foundation for the subsequent 'Egyptianisation' of Nubia and the broader territory that would eventually comprise Sudan (Arkell 1955; Ḥasan 1973:3; Redford 2006).

This early institutionalisation of labour practices, rooted in slavery and marked by skin colour-based xenophobia, laid the groundwork for a hierarchical system of exploitation. Skin colour became a key categorical marker used to signify social status and labour roles, with darker-skinned groups relegated to the lowest rungs of the social and economic order. This classification set the stage for categorical violence, where labour exploitation was justified through rigid social hierarchies tied to physical appearance. The exploitation of darker-skinned groups, tied directly to the devaluation of their labour, persisted over centuries, forming the basis of Sudan's subsequent labour relations. Thus, the institution of slavery

linked to xenophobia was not only the beginning of exploitation but also inseparably tied to the broader dynamics of work and labour.

4.2.2 Labour Dynamics and Religious Transformation in Christian Nubia (400-1500AD)

During medieval Christian Nubia, labour dynamics continued to reflect the social hierarchies of earlier periods. Xenophobia and colour-based discrimination persisted, relegating darker-skinned individuals to labour-intensive tasks, such as agriculture (Welsby 2002) and gold mining (Ḥasan 1973) within Nubia's feudal economy.¹³ Nubian elites sourced slaves from the south, perpetuating a labour system that supplied Egypt with non-Nubian “darker people” (Iṣṭākhri 1870:41–42).

The introduction of Coptic Christianity in the sixth century through Egyptian migration further altered social dynamics, transitioning from a localised belief system, but it was Islamisation through Arab migration in the following centuries that played a more significant role in reshaping Nubia's social structure (Arnold 1913; Gadallah 1959). Arabs intermarried with Nubian royalty, accelerating the spread of Islam and transforming Nubia's matriarchal system to one following Arab patriarchal familial and tribal structures (Abdel Rahim 1973).

The migration of Egyptians and Arabs reinforced existing racial hierarchies, reflected in the naming of the region as *Bilal al-Sudan* or the 'Land of the Blacks' (O'Fahey and Spaulding 1974:vii). To meet the rising demand for slaves, Arab merchants employed local chiefs and traders as intermediaries in the slave trade, exchanging captives for commodities (Ḥasan 1973:47). Slaves were primarily non-Muslims, as Islamic law forbade enslaving Muslims or *dhimmis*.¹⁴ The influx of Arabs into Sudan reshaped livelihood practices and led to the emergence of new ethnic groups with distinct genealogical and occupational identities. Arab nomads, initially sheep and camel herders in regions like Kordofan and Darfur, eventually

¹³ The concept of feudalism varies globally. In Western Europe, Bloch (1961) defines feudalism as a social framework based on land ownership (fiefs) exchanged for labour or service, with a focus on interdependence among lords, vassals, and peasants. Marx (1964) views it as a pre-capitalist economic system, defined by limited social mobility and exploitation. However, the applicability of these definitions to non-European contexts (Byres and Mukhia 1985), including Africa (Goody 1963; Maquet 1962), remains debated.

¹⁴ Dhimmis are non-Muslims, such as Jews and Christians, who are granted protection and a distinct legal status under Islamic law (Ye'or 1985).

migrated further south to areas better suited for cattle, leading to their new identification as Baggara, meaning cattle herders (Ḥasan 1973:167). This adaptation not only highlighted the nomads' flexibility but also solidified a new identity grounded in cattle herding.

During their migration, the Baggara displaced the original Nuba inhabitants, pushing them further south. Some displaced individuals intermarried with the Baggara and other African communities (MacMichael 1912:4). Despite these growing family ties, the Baggara remained active slave raiders due to their proximity to other groups. The Baggara's influence, driven by their dual roles as slave traders and Islamic missionaries (Ḥasan 1973:25), reinforced the exploitation of marginalised groups, especially through the slave trade, despite their intermarrying with them. Their activities entrenched categorical divisions based on skin colour, faith, and occupation. This exploitation laid the foundation for deeply stratified labour systems in Sudan, in which racial and ethnic hierarchies determined labour access and roles, creating the conditions for the categorical violence that shaped Sudan's evolving labour regimes.

4.2.3 Labour, Power, and Trade under Islamic Sultanates: Islamisation, Arabisation, and Merchant Capitalism (1504-1821/74)

4.2.3.1 *Arabisation, Islamisation, and Labour Division under the Islamic Sultanate*

The process of Arabisation and Islamisation, initiated by Arab migration, significantly reshaped labour relations during the era of Islamic sultanates in Sennar and Darfur. The Funj society systematically entrenched colourism, categorising its population into six classes primarily based on skin colour, as Cailliaud (1826:273–74) noted. This led to a stratified labour system, where darker-skinned non-Muslims, mainly slaves, were relegated to the lowest strata (Spaulding 1985).

The Arab traders' influence grew during this period, intensifying the slave trade and establishing trading as a prestigious profession. Conversion to Islam became essential not only for economic gains but also for securing power within the Funj aristocracy and facilitating trade with Muslim-majority Egypt (Bruce 1804). The Funj aristocracy had faced

persistent challenges from various quarters, notably the Arabised Nubian Riverain group known as the Shaigiyya, located to the north of the kingdom. Both the Shaigiyya and European entities had continually questioned the nobility of the Funj rulers, characterising them as inferior pagan Africans originating from the White Nile (Hoskins 1835) and even dubbing their domain the “Black Sultanate” (Paul 1954:18). Embracing Islam not only conferred status upon the Funj rulers but bolstered their authority, helping them to govern the increasingly Arabised population (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:32–33).

As the Funj rulers consolidated power, Arabisation and Islamisation also eroded the matrilineal power structure within the aristocracy, replacing it with the Islamic patriarchal system. This restructuring extended to gender relations among commoners, where Islamisation gave rise to a new middle class which, influenced by Mediterranean commercial capitalism, upheld Islamic norms and trade-based wealth (Kapteijns 1989; Spaulding 1985). Arabic literacy became a hallmark of this emerging class, whose members also projected an elevated social status through physical and cultural practices such as abstaining from alcohol and adopting orthodox Islamic values (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:80). Concurrently, urban centres saw a more conservative approach to women’s roles, including shifts in women’s attire (Lejean 1865:27), and a decline in their leadership in ceremonies, reflecting growing conformity to Islamic norms (Hoskins 1835:160–62).

4.2.3.2 Labour Transformation and Agricultural Practices in Funj Sultanate Households

The dynamics of slavery and the division of labour brought about changes in both household and agricultural work. One such involved the ownership of slaves within households. The aforementioned new middle class emerged as owners of both male and female slaves, assigning them distinct roles. Typically, male slaves were tasked with field cultivation, while female slaves undertook domestic responsibilities such as fetching water and cleaning (but not cooking). This allocation of tasks allowed slave-owning families to devote their full attention to their primary pursuits, which were often centred around commerce (Cailliaud 1826:116). In Berber and Shendi, in the current-day River Nile state in northern Sudan, most families owned one or two slaves (Burckhardt 1822:307). Consequently, owning slaves

became a prerequisite for individuals aspiring to elevate their social standing to the middle class, particularly for traders or ambitious farmers (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:81). This transformation thus solidified the connection between slave ownership and upward mobility during this era.

Early evidence highlights patterns of labour specialisation in agriculture. In Dongola, situated in today’s Northern State and reliant on river-based agriculture, the *saqiya*, or waterwheel system, was prevalent. Here, distinct tasks were assigned to each worker, including a supervisor (*samad*), those under the samad’s supervision (*turabla*), an oxen driver (usually a boy, the *auretti*), and a child designated to scare birds away from the crops (Nicholls 1918). Typically, the land was owned by a male landlord, who abstained from direct involvement in the labour. Workers frequently hailed from the samad’s immediate family or at the very least, his neighbours. The auretti was often a child of the samad or the turabla.

The fruits of the labour were allocated through various means, including crop shares, monthly wages (only for non-family auretti), food, and drink. The distribution was contingent on the nature and duration of labour responsibilities. Approximately one-sixth of the crop was allocated to the landlord, one-fifth to the saqiya owner, and one-eighth to the samad. After accounting for seed repayment, the remaining portion, about half of the crop, was divided between the turabla and the owners of the oxen. Additionally, the saqiya system’s upkeep involved other contributors deserving compensation, including Arab basket makers and suppliers, those providing donkeys (to power the saqiya), and blacksmiths (Nicholls 1918:23–24). Examining the saqiya system description, it becomes evident that agricultural work was initially distributed within the immediate family circle, although children who participated in labour were not paid. Moreover, the division of the harvest reveals the existence of wage labour relationships during this era.

4.2.3.3 *Exploitation and Labour Migration into Kordofan*

During the Funj era, rulers systematically exploited their power to increase revenue through taxation, supported by a spy network that gathered details about subjects’ occupations, facilitating effective tax collection (Spaulding 1984:139). Informed by this intelligence, the sultan imposed no fewer than five distinct types of taxation on different demographic

groups (Paul 1954:23). Calliaud (1826) suggests that this intelligence likely contributed to the creation of the six skin-colour dependent classes previously discussed, highlighting how the prevailing social hierarchy was exploited for tax purposes.

Arabised tribes, primarily from Northern Riverain areas, were appointed as tax collectors (Spaulding 1984), and often resorted to punitive measures such as physical assault or detainment against those who failed to meet their obligations. In addition to taxes, peasants were forced to provide unpaid labour for projects such as castle or reservoir construction (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:51), expanding coerced labour beyond mere taxation.

Merchant dominance further entrenched these power imbalances. A significant labour dynamic was the rural money lending system, or *sheil*, which continues in Kordofan today. Hartmann (1863:442–45) describes cases where peasants, borrowing from traders or landlords before harvest, faced severe consequences for default, ranging from confiscation of their crops to the destruction of their homes.

Peasants who sought to escape this cycle of debt and exploitation often transitioned into trade. Lacking significant capital or powerful backers, many moved to Kordofan, hoping for better opportunities (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:83). As a buffer state between the Funj kingdom and Darfur, Kordofan was not strictly governed (MacMichael 1912): the Funj rulers perceived Kordofan as a realm of “vast pagan territories” (Adams 1977:471), ripe for slave-raiding opportunities. The absence of a ruling state allowed lower-class families from the Northern Riverain tribes in the north to migrate and establish themselves as merchants in Kordofan, building new towns and trading hubs like Bara and El-Obeid (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:93–103). Starting as petty traders, migrants from Northern Riverain areas gradually took control of the gold and slave trades, underscoring Kordofan’s pivotal role as a gateway to economic mobility and new trading centres (O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974:93).

4.3 Militarised Labour through Colonisation, *Jihad* and Merchant Capitalism

4.3.1 Turko-Egyptian Sudan (1820-1885)

4.3.1.1 *Colonial Ignorance and Undervaluation of Sudanese Labour*

In 1820, much of present-day Sudan came under Turko-Egyptian rule after the fall of the Funj Sultanate. The Ottomans sought slaves and gold, and their policies shaped Sudanese labour relations. This period saw an influx of foreign officials and soldiers unprecedented in Sudan's history. Over 64 years, thirty-one governors—mostly Egyptian, Turkish, or British—were appointed, though they had limited understanding of Sudan's complexities (Hill 1959).

Turko-Egyptian authorities held stereotypical views of Sudanese workers, associating them with combat and menial labour (Hill 1959:49). This perceived lack of skilled workers led the Ottomans to import Egyptian specialists for various trades, including opium and cotton cultivation, tanning, and carpentry. An attempt to establish a tannery staffed by Egyptians in Sudan was abandoned when local leather proved as good as the Egyptian product (Hill 1959:50–51). These efforts were aimed more at imperial revenue than Sudanese development and largely failed (Holt and Daly 2014:58).

In military reform, the Ottomans faced a shortage of Egyptian peasants, having already conscripted many into the army, and chose to prioritise the Egyptian workforce for tasks within Egypt, turning to Sudanese slaves for military, agricultural, and industrial roles (Hill 1959:25). This reflected a clear division in how the two groups were valued, with Egyptian labour being protected and Sudanese labour heavily exploited.

Slave raids expanded in traditional slave-raiding territories (Sikainga 1996:11), notably Kordofan's Nuba Mountains (Abdelgabar 1997:41), and the states of Blue Nile and Darfur (Rolandsen and Daly 2016:10). The Viceroy aimed to create a “black army” (Hill 1959:7), focusing on recruiting darker-skinned populations, and many slaves from Kordofan, pagan upon capture, were forcibly converted to Islam in Egypt (Hill 1959:25), fulfilling the Viceroy's vision of bolstering military strength.

4.3.1.2 *Intra-Group Labour Relations around Tax Collection and Sources of Slave Labour*

To satisfy the Empire's demand for slaves and ease the burden of governance, Turko-Egyptian governors adopted 'indirect rule', relying on local elites, especially from Northern Riverain tribes. The first governor, Ismail Pasha, recognised the Shaigiyya for their military skill, using them as irregular cavalry (Hill 1959:9). When not engaged in military tasks, these forces collected taxes and raided darker-skinned populations for the Empire's benefit (Hill 1959:27).

Other Northern Riverain groups, such as the Danagla, were conscripted as tax collectors (MacMichael 1912:34), while the Jaalyin served as Ottoman trade agents, known as *jallaba* (Bjørkelo 1984). These groups, working closely with tribal leaders and village chiefs, facilitated tax collection and slave trading in rural areas, forming a crucial part of the Ottoman governance structure (Hill 1959:15). As taxation grew stricter, rural communities struggled to meet their obligations. For example, while the Baggara typically paid taxes in cattle, the Viceroy permitted slaves as an alternative, encouraging the Baggara to raid for slaves (Hill 1959:40).

Slave raids followed racial and ethnic lines. Southern Sudanese groups, such as the Nuba, Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk, were captured by armed groups, often Baggara pastoralists with Arabised affiliations (Jok 2001). Tribal leaders assisted these raids by providing intelligence and deciding which individuals would be enslaved (Ewald 1990). Once captured, the slaves were sold to *jallaba* merchants.¹⁵

As the slave trade intensified, *jallaba* traders gained prominence and their access to cash allowed them to manipulate labour dynamics, even with Ottoman authorities. Due to financial difficulties, the Empire negotiated with the *jallaba* to pay employees in goods instead of wages (Stewart 1883:5). To protect their interests, *jallaba* merchants fortified their enclaves (*zaribas*), armed their escorts, and rationalised their violent activities, often

¹⁵ The procurement of slave labour, involving traditional chiefs and extended families (e.g., the Baggara-Nuba dynamic), highlights the critical role of social relationships in sustaining a coercive labour system. This form of labour coercion mirrors patterns across Africa, where chiefs aided colonial and pre-colonial authorities (Sender and Smith 1986), as seen in Kenya (Stichter 1982) and Nyasaland/Malawi (Vail 1989).

invoking religious justifications (Ewald 1990:169, 173). They also displayed increased Islamic devotion (Schweinfurth 1873:322), using religion to legitimise the exploitation of non-Muslims and adorning their quarters and caravans with Qur'anic flags (Ewald 1990:176).

4.3.2 Mahdist Sudan (1885-1899)

In the early 1880s, Muhammad Ahmad, a Dongolawi and self-proclaimed *Mahdi* (Guided One), led a movement against the mismanagement of Turko-Egyptian rule. Kordofan, which was suffering severe socio-economic hardship, became a focal point for the revolt (Hill 1967:247). The Mahdi's victory in El-Obeid in 1883 drew widespread support from petty traders, farmers, nomads, and slaves (Sikainga 1996:29) and, by 1885, he had defeated the Turko-Egyptian forces and established the Caliphate of Omdurman, rooted in Arab-Islamic and Sudanese nationalism.

Under Mahdist rule (*al-Mahadiyya*), the slave trade, previously suppressed by British Ottoman Governor Gordon, was revived (Warburg 1991) to support the *jihad* army and for agricultural and domestic labour (Sikainga 1996:29–31). Slavery was justified through Islam, with the "unbelievers" of South Sudan and Kordofan targeted as war booty (Rolandsen and Daly 2016:26).

Women's labour during al-Mahadiyya was shaped by warfare and the social obligations of the *Ansar*, the Mahdi's followers. Many women, left widowed by the conflict, became part of the urban slave population or were distributed among Ansar families (Sikainga 1996:34). Moreover, 'voluntary labour' became common, with daughters of the Ansar working in the households of Mahdist leaders as an act of loyalty and to gain blessings (Sikainga 1996:31).

4.4 The Ethnicisation of Labour and Wage Labour Development

4.4.1 Labour Policies under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1955)

In the late 19th century, the British, having occupied Egypt since 1882, sought to reclaim Sudan, referred to as Egypt's 'lost provinces', as part of the 'Scramble for Africa'. This effort culminated in the Battle of Omdurman, where the Mahdist army was defeated by a joint British-Egyptian operation. The 1899 Condominium Agreement established the shared rule

of Sudan by Britain and Egypt, though in practice, Britain dominated (Lea 1994:2; Rolandsen and Daly 2016:34).

The British held key government positions, while Egyptians were relegated to lower-ranking roles, including garrison duties. The Anglo-Egyptian garrison consisted largely of Egyptian Army personnel, with Sudanese battalions made up of ex-slaves and Southerners (Rolandsen and Daly 2016:35). British and Egyptian officers worked closely with Northern Riverain Arab elites, reinforcing pre-existing racial and ethnic labour divisions. The British also introduced perspectives influenced by the Western European intellectual tradition, particularly evolutionism, along with their understanding of slavery from experiences in the New World (Sikainga 1996). Their outlook led them to conceptualise labour through an ethnic lens, assuming that distinct ethnic groups possessed varying labour characteristics linked to their cultural and physical attributes (O'Brien 1986).¹⁶

The colonial administration divided the Sudanese into three categories: Arabs, Sudanese, and Fallata (Sikainga 1996:65). 'Arabs' were seen as unproductive or unwilling to work, while 'Sudanese' (ex-slaves and non-Arab groups from the Nuba Mountains and South Sudan) were considered suited for strenuous manual labour, requiring strict discipline. The third category, Fallata, comprised West African immigrants who were stereotyped as skilled in demanding, menial agricultural tasks (Duffield 1981).

Like elsewhere in Africa, Sudan's colonial administration faced difficulties in securing labour for agricultural and infrastructure projects.¹⁷ Many 'Arab' Sudanese were already engaged in agriculture, pastoralism, or trade, making them less inclined to transition to wage labour (Sikainga 1996:65). Consequently, the British targeted slaves, Sudanese, and Fallata for hard, unskilled labour. Similar to Ottoman practices, the colonial army recruited darker-skinned Sudanese, seen as having superior military qualities, but subjected non-Muslim recruits to forced circumcision and Arabic name changes (Rolandsen and Daly 2016:35).

¹⁶ The creation of ethnic categories and stereotypes around labour was common throughout colonial Africa (Vail 1989).

¹⁷ Labour scarcity in late 19th and early 20th century Africa was common (Goody 1979; Lonsdale and Berman 1979). Sender and Smith (1986:46) argue that African pre-capitalist social structures enabled resistance to colonial wage labour systems.

While many Sudan historians focus on the recruitment of ex-slave groups into the colonial military without exploring their ethnicities (Daly 2004; Hill 1959), it is important to note that the colonial army officers primarily consisted of the Northern Riverain group, particularly the Shaigiyya. Additionally, the Baggara, a cattle-owning group, along with the Nuba and other people from present-day Sudan, served as soldiers. This recruitment reflected the complex social dynamics of Sudan during this period.¹⁸

Despite promoting anti-slavery rhetoric, the British allowed their allies, including slave-owning Arab elites, to keep their slaves, fearing that abolition would destabilise the economy. Instead, they relied on runaway and liberated slaves as their primary labour force (Sikainga 1996:68). In 1905, the Central Labour Bureau was created to regulate slavery and labour shortages by registering slaves and controlling their movement (Sikainga 1996:47). However, it struggled with record-keeping, and its uniform wage system failed to retain workers (Sikainga 1996:68–70). The colonial government also introduced the Vagabonds Ordinance, allowing the prosecution of unemployed runaway slaves (Sikainga 1996:47), and designated quarters in towns for freed slaves to boost labour supply, reduce crime, and ease the transition for former slave owners (Sikainga 1996:49).

4.4.2 The Development of Wage Labour (1920s-1950s)

From the 1920s to the 1950s, Sudan experienced significant socio-economic changes, especially in labour relations, as wage labour emerged. A key driver was the expansion of cash crop cultivation, particularly cotton under the Gezira Scheme, which led to a high demand for agricultural labour. Working conditions within the Scheme were marked by forced labour, with the Fallata and migrants from Kordofan, Darfur, and Chad recruited to meet labour shortages. British investors, notably Lancashire textile manufacturers and the Sudan Plantations Syndicate, reaped the profits, keeping wages exceptionally low (Collins 1976:10).

The 1921 Gezira Land Ordinance restricted Sudanese peasants' access to land (Serels 2007), forcing them into wage labour.¹⁹ Tenants were compelled to grow cotton under the

¹⁸ Interviews, Hafiz, 20/3/2023.

¹⁹ Similar colonial policy was also practised in coastal Kenya (Hamidin 2000) and Eastern Nigeria (Korieh 2012).

Syndicate's strict oversight, creating a capitalist agriculture system in the region. This approach aimed to prevent the rise of a large landless proletariat (Ali and O'Brien 1984:220). While subsistence farming was preserved, it was insufficient to meet all needs, reinforcing low wages (Collins 1976:10). The British administration's focus on short-term revenue generation through the Gezira model shaped labour patterns, establishing a seasonal labour migration system. This allowed peasants and pastoralists to continue their local productive activities outside the cotton-picking season (Ali and O'Brien 1984:220). After quelling nationalist resistance in the early 1920s, the British intensified taxation to drive Sudanese labour into the Gezira Scheme. They also promoted consumer goods and prohibited private cotton cultivation to compel Sudanese to buy expensive Manchester-made cloth (Ali and O'Brien 1984:221) as well as further restricting other sectors that could compete for labour with the Gezira Scheme (Gaitskell 1959; O'Brien 1983). These policies reshaped Sudanese labour dynamics, aligning them with British objectives of labour control and revenue generation.

Until the 1950s, most seasonal labour migrants to the Gezira Scheme came from areas near the Scheme or along the railway in central Kordofan. These migrants engaged in wage labour sporadically to mitigate crop failures and price fluctuations in their home regions. Wage labour also helped them prepare for significant life events, such as marriages (Ali and O'Brien 1984:223). Ali and O'Brien (1984) analyse factors influencing seasonal labour migration in central Kordofan, highlighting the role of women in productive activities and attitudes towards work. In nomadic families, women regularly participated in agricultural tasks such as cotton picking, while in strongly patriarchal families, only men engaged in seasonal wage labour, focusing instead on local agricultural production (Ali and O'Brien 1984:223; O'Brien 1983).

4.4.3 Indirect Rule, Emancipation, and 'Sudanisation' (1920s-1955)

During the latter half of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, labour dynamics shifted from ethnic divisions to religio-political sectarianism. From the late 1920s, colonial administrators increasingly relied on sectarian religious leaders and local traditional authorities to govern, particularly in rural areas. Tribal and village sheikhs were given control over 'native' lands,

but remained under the supervision of British district commissioners (Collins 1976). The British also aligned with the Mahdiyya and Khatmiyya Sufi orders depending on the political context, further shaping labour relations.

The Mahdiyya, once marginalised by the British, regained power, especially in Kordofan, and transformed into a feudal aristocracy. The British reinforced this alliance by granting government contracts, such as fuelwood supply for the Sudanese Army, strengthening the Mahdiyya's influence (Collins 1976:6). The Ansar militias, particularly the Baggara, also played a key role in consolidating control in rural areas.

Following World War I, the Anglo-Egyptian government intensified anti-slavery efforts due to international pressure but faced resistance from Arab slave owners. Some even attacked government offices, demanding their slaves be returned (Sikainga 1996:101). British officials shared concerns about the effects of emancipation, arguing that freed male slaves would not work unless coerced, and female slaves would resort to prostitution, although criminal statistics did not support these claims (Sikainga 1996:50). The 1905 Vagabonds Ordinance allowed British authorities to continue prosecuting liberated slaves and use them as cheap labour (Sikainga 1996:47).

Emancipation was particularly complex for female slaves due to their roles in household labour and reproduction: many slave owners resisted their emancipation, fearing the disruption of domestic arrangements. However, some women left their owners despite leaving children behind, often turning to prostitution or selling beverages in urban areas to survive (Sikainga 1996:54–55).

As the colonial era drew to a close, 'Sudanisation' accelerated, particularly in technical civil service roles. Graduates of Gordon College (now the University of Khartoum) from Northern Riverain tribes, notably the Danagla and Jaalyin (Mann 2014:565), dominated state institutions and expanded their businesses (Collins 2014; Mahmoud 1984). Alongside the Shaigiyya in the military, these three tribes, referred to as the 'Gang of Three' by some non-Arab Sudanese, solidified their dominance in senior administrative and security-military roles within the government.²⁰

²⁰ Interview and email exchange, Hafiz, 17/9/2019 and 20/3/2023.

Although civil service jobs were prestigious (Holt 1961), Sudanese elites found their tasks and salaries unsatisfactory (Vezzadini 2015:205), and often felt humiliated by their British supervisors (Garang 1970:14-15, cited in Collins 1976:8). These frustrations contributed to the emergence of Sudanese communist, labour, and nationalist movements. By the 1940s, unions had been formed by railway and telecommunications workers, influenced by communist ideologies, which eventually coalesced into the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation in 1950, advocating for independence and better labour conditions.

Urban discontent grew as wages stagnated despite economic growth driven by cotton exports.²¹ Opposition to the colonial strategy of indirect rule and the Southern Policy, which separated Southern and Northern administration and allowed Christian missionaries to promote Christianity (Mayo 1994), further intensified the labour movement. Union members and urban intellectuals played a key role in challenging these policies, setting the stage for Sudan's independence in 1956. However, from the Southern perspective, the movement failed to adequately address critical issues of labour and self-determination. British and Egyptian authorities continued to favour northern elites, excluding Southern voices from the discussions on independence and the future of Sudan (Badal 1977).

The adoption of Arabic as the official working language further alienated Southerners, many of whom were trained in English. This imposition heightened fears of cultural marginalisation and reinforced divisions. The 1954 Sudanisation Commission allocated only six of 800 senior administrative positions to Southerners, none of them governorships, deepening their frustration (Badal 1977:283). These grievances over labour, governance, and language fuelled mistrust, with Southerners viewing the new Sudan as illegitimate. Northern elites' failure to deliver on promises of federalism led to a mutiny by Southern army officers in 1955, sparking the First Sudanese Civil War. Political negotiations involving Sudan, Egypt, and Britain led to Sudan's self-determination during the war, as Egypt faced its own revolution, initiating a transitional period in 1956.

²¹ Throughout both World Wars, Sudan experienced a significant increase in import values, from eight million Egyptian pounds in 1941 to 42 million by 1951, while export values grew from 8.9 million to 62 million Egyptian pounds during the same period (Holt and Daly 2014:106–7).

4.5 Religio-Political Divided Labour and Capitalist Transformation in Post-Independence Sudan (1956-1988)

4.5.1 Productivity-Based Classification of Sudanese Labour

In the aftermath of the First Sudanese Civil War and the complex dynamics of independence, Sudanese policymakers began adopting international frameworks to shape their understanding of Sudanese labour and economic development. This period saw the increased use of national income statistics, which allowed for development planning and estimates of potential investment returns (Young 2017:108). Sudan's economy and labour were often categorised in terms of regional and sectoral divisions, particularly focusing on the distinction between areas of concentrated investment and those deemed peripheral. This approach led to the neglect of 'traditional' regions, with investment focused on the central triangle surrounding the Gezira Scheme. Expanding agriculture and economic activity beyond this area was deemed financially unsustainable (Young 2017:119). As a result, regions like western Sudan, despite cultivating profitable cash crops such as groundnuts and gum arabic, were labelled backward due to their traditional methods, excluding them from state support (Young 2017:121).

Sudanese policymakers faced challenges in understanding the complexities of labour during this period. In 1968, 71% of the labour force was involved in agriculture, with the majority engaged in traditional agricultural practices (Mustafa 1976:33). Despite their crucial role in the economy, these workers were frequently labelled as underemployed, based on the assumption that traditional agriculture productivity was only half that of modern agriculture (ibid.). Traditional farmers were often seen as destined to migrate from rural to urban areas in pursuit of better income opportunities, with a presumed transition from agriculture to the industry and service sectors (Mustafa 1976:34). Similarly, the urban economy was divided into formal and informal sectors, with informal labour typically characterised as family-based, small-scale, and labour-intensive. Informal work was often considered a temporary alternative to unemployment, with Sudanese policymakers lacking clarity on the specific skills deemed necessary for more formal employment (ibid.). Despite the significant portion of the workforce engaged in informal labour, this sector received little attention or investment from policymakers.

In 1978, the ILO Sudan categorised the prevalent form of employment in traditional agriculture as self-employment, deeming it to occur in “various modes of production and not an immediate concern to [ILO Sudan]” (Keddeman 1978:81). This perspective was further reinforced by the humanitarian and liberal peacebuilders who entered Sudan in the 1980s, following the arrival of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in the eastern part of the country. Both UNHCR and ILO regarded these refugees as a ‘problem’ and believed that their ‘self-employment’ would automatically integrate them into Sudanese labour markets (El-Bagir and Dey 1984).

4.5.2 Arabising and Islamising State Employment and the Emergence of the ‘Purge’ Policy

In addition to classifying labour based on productivity and economic factors, Northern elites’ control over Southern Sudan influenced state recruitment policies, especially concerning Southerners. After independence, Sudan faced politically unstable parliamentary democracies and military regimes. Civilian administrations under Khalil (1956–58) and El-Azhari (1954–56, 1965–69) aimed to extend Islam to the South, believing that Islamisation and Arabisation could help resolve the North-South conflict and promote national integration (Poggo 2002:96). However, it was during General Abboud’s military regime (1958–1964) that the explicit promotion of Islam and Arabisation as tools to control labour emerged.

Abboud intensified the use of Arabic in government offices, effectively excluding Southerners, many of whom lacked proficiency in Arabic, from government positions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Poggo 2002:75). This language policy extended to the military, where Southerners had been actively recruited, and to educational institutions in the South. While some Southerners initially welcomed a national curriculum, the government’s failure to support Arabic language learning (Beninyo 1996) and the imposition of Quranic schools deepened their frustration (Poggo 2002:91). These policies created structural barriers to Southerners’ access to state employment.

The escalating dissatisfaction with Abboud’s policies, especially the exclusion of Southerners from state employment and the forced imposition of Arabic, led to widespread frustration.

Discontent over the government's Islamisation and Arabisation efforts, which deepened the North-South divide, culminated in the October 1964 Revolution. This transformative movement, driven by students, professionals, and labour unions, resulted in Abboud's removal from power. In the aftermath, the 'purge' policy was introduced, aimed at dismissing civil servants whose loyalty was in doubt. This policy targeted individuals perceived as disloyal, not necessarily based on political affiliations but often on personal connections and suspicions. The reliance on personal networks for employment grew, as documented by the Employment Exchange Centres of the Department of Labour in 1972/73. These centres revealed that many unemployed individuals depended more on family-based connections to secure jobs than on formal services offered by the Centres (Mustafa 1976:40). The 'purge' policy was later revived by Nimeiry in 1971 following a failed communist coup, further institutionalising the dismissal of those considered politically unreliable.

Under Jaafar Nimeiry's military, socialist, and pan-Arabist government (1969–1985), labour laws and the economy were heavily influenced by political Islam. The 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) by granting regional autonomy to the South, caused discontent among Northern religious elites. At the same time, Nimeiry's ties with conservative Gulf countries, which invested over \$2 billion in Sudan between 1975 and 1985 (Kontos 1990:649), prompted him to adopt more Islamic rhetoric to appease these elites. In 1983, Nimeiry imposed Sharia law nationwide, including in the non-Islamic South, igniting the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005). This shift in policy laid the foundation for defining labour and access to employment within an Islamic legal framework.

Nimeiry's economic policies, particularly his focus on cotton despite declining international demand and poor harvests, severely weakened Sudan's economy. Following the 1974 oil boom, many Northern Riverain males migrated to oil-rich Gulf countries, where they found a culturally familiar environment that eased their transition (Abusharaf 1997:520). The remittances they sent home strengthened the economic standing of Northern elites, playing a significant role in shaping political developments and elevating certain social groups amidst Sudan's broader economic challenges (Jamal 1991:17).

4.5.3 Capitalist Transformation of Rural Family Labour

Starting in the 1970s, Kordofan experienced a capitalist transformation in rural family labour as Sudan adopted more export-oriented policies. Seasonal agricultural workers on the Gezira Scheme began investing their earnings to employ migrant labourers for their own fields in Kordofan, shifting production towards cash crops such as sorghum, sesame, and groundnuts, which offered higher labour returns than millet (Ali and O'Brien 1984:230). As production became focused on market returns, farmers increasingly relied on purchased food, while migrant labourers settled in villages and were allocated small plots by local landlords. This shift toward individual land ownership contributed to an increase in landless families, as local farmers were displaced when landlords granted land to migrant labourers. Landlords were incentivised to prioritise migrants over local farmers due to the migrants' role as a consistent pool of wage labourers who could be more easily controlled through tenancy arrangements, debt obligations, and sharecropping agreements (ibid.).

Education, particularly for boys, became more important, reducing the size of family groups participating in seasonal cotton picking. Young men sought higher-paying jobs, often in crops such as sorghum, while children began demanding wages for their labour by 1977, reflecting the growing monetisation of labour relationships (Ali and O'Brien 1984:231). Successful agricultural groups employed wage labour rather than working themselves, but many landless farmers had no choice but to work for wages during the annual cycle. The need for money drove teenage boys to migrate to towns for wage labour, further limiting family participation in domestic work (ibid.).

By the 1970s, capitalist production intensified labour efforts without introducing new techniques, leading to the individualisation of labour relations and a shift from ethnic segmentation to social differentiation. This transition created a crisis in agricultural labour and the broader economy by the late 1970s (Ali and O'Brien 1984:234). As a part of its negotiations with the Sudanese government for a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the IMF pushed for the expansion of mechanised agriculture to boost exports. Mechanisation also reinforced and concentrated seasonal labour demand in rural areas. In Kordofan, this transformation was particularly visible, as mechanised farms disrupted traditional practices.

Farmers with tractors often ignored agreed-upon migration routes of pastoralists, leading to conflicts. In some instances, farmers would intentionally set 'trap fields' along these routes, knowing that pastoralists' animals would graze on the crops, allowing the farmers to demand compensation (Babiker 2008). The rapid expansion of mechanised agriculture during this period sowed the seeds for frequent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, escalating tensions in the years that followed.

In 1985, the IMF-mandated price increases for essential goods sparked nationwide protests, leading to Nimeiry's overthrow. The following year, a coalition government led by sectarian leaders El-Mirghani of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and El-Mahdi of the Umma Party was formed. However, disagreements over key issues, such as relations with the South and sharia law, led to their downfall in 1989, when a military coup brought Omar El-Bashir to power.

4.6 Transformation to Patronage-Based Access to Labour, Radical Islamism, and Liberalisation (1989-2019)

4.6.1 Islamising Access to Work through *Tamkeen* (1989-1999)

The coup orchestrated by El-Bashir in 1989 served as a pretext for an Islamic Revolution led by Hassan El-Turabi and his NIF. The NIF, influenced by 1960s Salafism and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, aimed to ignite an Islamic revival. El-Bashir and El-Turabi expanded Nimeiry's political Islamism through their Islamic Salvation (*El-Ingaz*) programme, seeking to project this Islamic revival globally. Sudan's previous status as the 'Arab breadbasket' and its ties with Gulf countries laid the foundation for a more radical Islamic influence. The Ingaz regime's Islamist reform, known as *tamkeen* (empowerment), rested on four pillars: non-sectarian politics, economic liberalisation, Islamic revitalisation, and shifts in foreign relations—all within a militant conservative framework (Verhoeven 2015:84). This reform led to the banning of political parties and the dissolution of labour unions.

Economically, the *tamkeen* policy was coupled with neoliberalism. The NIF government was described as "politically authoritarian, ideologically totalitarian, and economically liberal" (Prunier 1989:380, cited in Beckedorf 2013:55). Sudan's economy had worsened before the

coup, and after 1989, most international development programmes ceased. The new regime spent two million USD daily on civil wars during the early 1990s (O'Ballance 2000:169). To address this, the Islamic Salvation programme embraced privatisation, subsidy cuts, deregulation, and land seizures.

Under tamkeen, the purge policy from the 1964 Revolution intensified, evolving into the 'loyalty before professionalism' ideology. According to Professor Assal of the University of Khartoum, political and religious loyalty to the NIF became the primary criterion for employment, sidelining professional competence. Civil servants viewed as opponents of the Islamist agenda were dismissed, and many positions were filled by NIF members or sympathisers.²² To obscure the NIF's direct role in the coup, key state positions were strategically granted to army officers aligned with Islamist ideology (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:91).

From 1989 to 1999, approximately 73,640 civil servants were dismissed, surpassing the total dismissals from 1904 to 1989 (Ali 2004, cited in Berridge 2016:206). Another estimate suggests up to 122,000 state employees—around 20% of the labour force—were replaced (SHWR 2004, cited in Assal 2010b:2). Recruitment and promotion became heavily reliant on personal connections, often tied to Islamist affiliations (Mann 2014:569). Even small traders who had associations with Ingaz mosques gained control over state-owned enterprises, and university graduates with Islamist affiliations were often favoured in employment opportunities over their non-affiliated counterparts (Verhoeven 2015:113).

Tamkeen also extended to private businesses and the banking system. Loans from Islamic banks were granted based on references from Islamist entrepreneurs, many of whom had longstanding personal or family connections, ensuring mutual support and excluding others (Jamal 1991:16). In addition, many Sudanese professionals who had migrated to Gulf countries sent remittances back (Galaleldin 1988), supporting the Islamist movement (Jamal 1991) and bolstering their families' business interests.

In the 1990s, a series of legal frameworks were introduced which further restricted labour. The Muslim Personal Status Law of 1991 significantly impacted women's status and labour

²² Correspondence, Professor Assal, University of Khartoum, 22/1/2023.

relations in Sudan by institutionalising gender inequality through a legal framework rooted in male guardianship (*qawama*). Under this law, women were required to obey their husbands and could not work outside the home without their husband's permission, limiting their access to employment and economic independence. The law reinforced traditional gender roles, treating women as legal minors and restricting their autonomy in marriage, education, and professional life. This placed women's economic participation under male control. Women from conflict-affected regions, such as Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, faced even greater difficulties, as patriarchal practices further limited their access to justice and employment opportunities, deepening socio-economic disparities (Equal Rights Trust 2014; SIHA 2021).

The implementation of the 1991 sharia-based Penal Code and the 1992 declaration of jihad against Christian and animist citizens further restricted women's labour rights. The Khartoum Public Order Act of 1998 empowered authorities to arrest and flog vendors, particularly affecting female workers, especially displaced women from conflict-affected regions like the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, who dominated street vending (SIHA Network and REDRESS 2017). These laws prohibited women from working between 10 pm and 6 am and imposed dress codes that banned wearing trousers, with violators subjected to physical punishment. Even though alcohol-related rules theoretically exempted Christians, in practice, they too faced arrests and fines. Various businesses deemed un-Islamic, including women's hairdressing, tailoring, and entertainment venues, were restricted, leading to closures.

Tamkeen also reformed educational institutions. The Ministry of Education was transformed, with NIF supporters taking over administrative and teaching roles. Student activism against the NIF was banned (Bredlid 2005:252), and the curriculum was reoriented towards Quranic memorisation and Arab-Islamic culture, excluding English. The number of university students surged from 6,080 in 1989 to 38,623 in 1999–2000, and the number of public universities from five in 1989 to 26 by 1996 (Assal 2010:5). However, despite this significant rise in enrolment and the increase in graduates, Assal notes that the expansion of higher education was not accompanied by a similar growth in job opportunities, leading to what he terms "brain waste" rather than "brain drain" (ibid.). This mismatch reflects a dual disconnect between education and the labour market, as limited job availability was

compounded by subpar education quality, with insufficient resources and planning leaving many graduates underprepared for the few jobs that did exist.

In the late 1990s, the economy saw temporary improvements due to oil production and foreign direct investment, which stabilised the currency. However, this period coincided with the intensification of jihad against non-Muslims in the South and the 'Three Areas' (South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Abyei). The government's violent suppression of groups with differing ideologies, under the guise of Islam, exacerbated religious tensions and further divided Sudanese society (Warburg 2002:206).

4.6.2 Wasta for Patronage-Based Labour Markets (1998-2019)

Tensions between El-Turabi and El-Bashir grew and, in 1998 with the establishment of the NCP and the integration of the NIF into the NCP, party leaders began assuming more formal roles within state institutions. In 1999, El-Bashir ousted El-Turabi and his supporters from both party and state positions. This event marked the NCP's shift from an ideology-driven, structured party to a patronage-centred one, centred around El-Bashir's authority (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:92).

In the later years of El-Bashir's leadership, showing allegiance to the Islamist cause was no longer sufficient to secure a state job. This was partly because showcasing such allegiance did not necessarily involve significant sacrifices for an already religiously-educated class, and partly because many job seekers only opportunistically joined the Islamist Movement to increase their chances of state employment. With the devaluing of educational qualifications, job seekers increasingly needed wasta, or personal connections to more influential figures within the elite, to secure employment (Mann 2014). In turn, these senior members of the elite owed their positions and success to their connections with El-Bashir (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:92).

Mann's (2014) study of wasta in Khartoum between 2008 and 2010 highlights the evolving nature of personal connections within Sudanese labour markets, shaped by financial Islamisation, the expansion of higher education, and liberalisation. Her research indicates that access to job opportunities has shifted across generations: older individuals used more formal means, such as central work offices and newspapers, while younger job seekers

increasingly rely on personal contacts (2014:561). A significant gendered pattern also emerges from Mann's data, showing that women job seekers have fewer diversified sources of information and tend to depend more on family members, especially male family members, for job leads. Specifically, her thesis reveals that women tend to have more family-based relationships than men when it comes to employment contacts, while female respondents also have more female contacts compared to male respondents (Mann 2011:165). These findings demonstrate how gendered access to information plays a key role in shaping labour market dynamics in Sudan, with women having fewer independent pathways to employment opportunities.

Mann's research also reveals that graduates from peripheral regions, such as Darfur and South Sudan, rely more heavily on publicly accessible job information than their counterparts from urban centres. This suggests that *wasta* is not exclusively tied to tribal or traditional factors but has evolved within Sudan's broader economic and social shifts (Mann 2014:563–64). This reliance on public resources could also be explained by the fact that students from these regions, being new to urban labour markets like Khartoum, may lack the established ethnically or socially reliable networks that their urban counterparts can draw upon. In this sense, *wasta* may reflect both the dynamics of social connections and the challenges faced by those lacking strong personal networks in competitive urban settings.

El-Bashir's regime gradually developed a patronage-based system driven by his military background. To neutralise potential threats, he secured the loyalty of key elites by offering state employment and expecting them to back him during crises (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:91). The NCP's 'loyalty before professionalism' doctrine solidified, making political connections essential for state employment and business opportunities. These personal networks became central to navigating Sudan's power structures, though the influence of social identity and family ties remained significant, particularly in securing state jobs.

While *wasta* has evolved over time and is no longer exclusively tied to ethnicity, Sudan's power dynamics have retained strong historical links to religious, racial, and ethnic lines. This is especially evident in the realm of labour market access, particularly for state jobs, where social identity and family connections continue to play a significant role. The military, for example, recruited individuals from various regions, but the higher echelons of officers were predominantly composed of Islamists from the Northern Riverain tribes. Notably, both

President El-Bashir and other senior state elites hailed from these tribes. It should be noted that El-Bashir's strategic allocation of state resources to maintain the loyalty of these officer groups led to a decline in the capabilities of lower-ranking officers and soldiers (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:93).

A similar pattern emerged within NISS, where top positions were predominantly filled by Islamists from Northern Riverain tribes, making work in secret security almost a family labour tradition within these groups.²³ Meanwhile, NISS developed an extensive informant network spanning government agencies, schools, urban areas, and villages, creating a more diverse labour composition compared to other security agencies (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:93).

Unlike NISS, rural militias such as the Janjaweed and RSF in Darfur and the Popular Defence Force (PDF) in Kordofan remained ethnically homogeneous. In Kordofan, for instance, the PDF was composed mainly of Baggara groups, including the Messiria and Hawazma tribes. The Janjaweed and RSF, led chiefly by individuals from the Rizeigat tribe—including RSF Commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) and his extended family—also reflected this homogeneity (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:94).

At the height of NCP dominance, families connected to the *Kezan*²⁴ network consolidated their power through strategic intermarriages among those with shared ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, particularly from Northern Riverain tribes.²⁵ These unions fortified their positions within Sudan's social hierarchy, further reinforcing their authority.

4.6.3 After South Sudan's Independence (2012-2019)

Following the loss of three-quarters of its oil revenue after South Sudan's independence in 2012, the Khartoum regime's patronage networks, especially those tied to key Islamist figures within the security sector, were severely weakened. Inflation compounded the

²³ Interview, Rabha, 20/3/2019.

²⁴ Kezan is a pejorative nickname for El-Bashir, his regime, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, and supporters of the National Congress Party (NCP). Kezan is the masculine plural form, while Koz refers to a singular masculine individual, and Koza refers to a singular feminine individual.

²⁵ Interview, Professor Assal, University of Khartoum, 23/9/2019.

problem, significantly reducing the purchasing power of state-employed civil servants. Despite the economic strain, the government allocated a staggering 70% of its national budget to defence, leaving only 1% for health and 2.3% for education in 2016-2017 (Nuba Reports 2016). This prioritisation of military spending, primarily aimed at countering insurgencies in peripheral regions, including Kordofan, further contributed to the declining conditions and low wages for public servants, particularly those in the social sectors.

The ramifications of this financial strain were also evident in the devaluation of the Sudanese pound. According to a university lecturer, professors' monthly wages, roughly equivalent to \$2,000 USD before 2012, were worth only \$100 USD by 2019.²⁶ Consequently, El-Bashir's ability to retain the loyalty of state workers, including those in influential positions, became progressively more difficult.

Faced with shrinking budgets and declining financial incentives, security agencies like NISS shifted their focus towards profit-generating business ventures. Dr Komey highlights that NISS expanded its financial operations by enhancing the profitability of private security companies, magnetic and ID card firms, and a wheat flour company, ventures established with El-Bashir's approval. NISS also acquired Sudan Airways through privatisation, offering significant profit potential.²⁷ A recent report shows that government leaders, including members of SAF and RSF, controlled over 400 private entities spanning agriculture, banking, and medical imports, with ownership increasingly concealed to evade sanctions (Cartier, Kahan, and Zukin 2022:13). Notably, key stakes in two major Sudanese banks are held by the military and Hemedti's family (ibid.). These ventures helped sustain financial stability within the security sectors during economic downturns, affecting labour dynamics across the country.

As El-Bashir's financial control weakened, the regime tightened its grip on the informal labour sector. In 2014, a police campaign targeting unregulated businesses was launched (Alalawi 2014), and Khartoum issued directives to revoke street vendors' permits, starting with tea vendors along Nile Street (Radio Dabanga 2014). These vendors, mostly internally displaced women from Darfur and Kordofan, had already paid fees to the Khartoum locality

²⁶ Interview, a lecturer, University of Khartoum, 27/1/2019.

²⁷ Interview, Dr Komey, University of Bahri, 11/2/2019.

government and the police to continue their work, yet they faced ongoing physical abuse and confiscation of their tools and belongings. Male vendors, such as shoe polishers, were generally only fined for failing to pay fees.

As the economy worsened, El-Bashir offered RSF services for hire, notably to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who paid substantial wages for RSF participation in the Yemen conflict. In 2019, when senior high school teachers earned about 3,000 SDG per month, RSF soldiers received 40,000 SDG (roughly 667 USD).²⁸ One NISS officer recounted how his son fainted from excitement upon receiving his RSF salary before deploying to Yemen.²⁹ Successful RSF soldiers were further rewarded with 200,000 SDG per month for six months (totalling 1,200,000 SDG or 20,000 USD). The RSF's financial strength enabled recruitment from other sectors, including the police and army, spurring a form of labour migration within the security forces.

Not all RSF members were permitted to join the Yemen mission, as illustrated by the case of a Christian Nuba soldier from El-Obeid. Having already been deployed, he was then informed that only Muslims could participate in combat. Faced with the choice between returning home without the financial reward or converting to Islam, he chose conversion on the spot.³⁰ This incident highlights how financial incentives tied to violent conflicts, particularly those involving Gulf countries, can reignite religious-based discrimination in the workplace.

The influence of Gulf countries continued to shape state employment dynamics in Sudan. As tensions rose between Qatar and Saudi Arabia/UAE in 2017, Saudi and UAE financial support to Sudan became contingent on El-Bashir maintaining control over Sudan's Islamist factions, many of whom were aligned with Qatar. El-Bashir responded by sidelining hardline Islamists in favour of elites loyal to him personally, rather than to the broader Islamist cause (Hassan and Kodouda 2019:96). The prolonged economic crisis, coupled with low wages and weakening regime loyalty, eventually led to the mobilisation of professional unions and civil society leaders. By 2016, shadow unions for lawyers, journalists, translators, and doctors

²⁸ Interview, Hussam, 4/7/2019.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Interview, Ustaz Osama, 21/4/2019.

had coalesced into the Sudan Professionals Association (SPA), which became a key player in the 2019 Sudanese Revolution.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter's historical examination of labour relations and labour market dynamics in Sudan underscores how deeply intertwined labour regimes and social hierarchies have been with the broader patterns of exploitation and domination. Throughout Sudanese history, race, ethnicity, and religion have consistently shaped who had access to valued labour and who was relegated to marginal, exploitative, or coerced work. The formation and evolution of Sudan's labour regimes—from the early trans-Saharan slave trade to the post-colonial era—was fundamentally shaped by these social categories. Elites in Sudan, whether colonial rulers, Northern Riverain groups, or Islamist state actors, have consistently used labour regimes to reinforce their control, often by exploiting racial and ethnic divisions. This resulted in the marginalisation of darker-skinned groups such as the Nuba and Southern Sudanese, who were systematically relegated to devalued forms of labour, while lighter-skinned elites, particularly the Jaalyin, Danagla, and Shaigiyya, monopolised power and resources. Tilly's (1999) concept of inequality mechanisms is particularly useful for understanding how these elites controlled labour opportunities, consolidating economic power and reinforcing social hierarchies over generations.

Sudanese labour markets were not just sites of economic exchange; they were also arenas of power where racial, ethnic, and religious divides were reinforced and reproduced. The various phases of capitalist expansion—from colonial exploitation to the neoliberal economic reforms of the late 20th century—intensified these divisions. Capitalism operated alongside racial and ethnic categorisations to further entrench inequalities, as seen in the export-oriented projects such as the Gezira Scheme, where the labour of marginalised groups was devalued and exploited to serve the economic interests of elites and external actors. These historical processes created labour regimes that systematically undervalued the contributions of marginalised groups while privileging lighter-skinned elites in positions of power. In this way, labour markets themselves became a mechanism for the perpetuation of structural inequalities.

The involvement of external actors—whether Ottoman rulers, British colonial authorities, or contemporary international development actors—further deepened the exploitation of Sudan’s labour regimes. These actors often imposed labour policies that served their economic interests, using violence and coercion to manipulate labour markets., and colonial ordinances and forced taxation pushed many Sudanese into exploitative labour arrangements. The chapter highlights how external actors, in collaboration with local elites, used violence—both physical and structural—to secure access to labour and control economic resources, ensuring that power remained concentrated in the hands of a few. Categorisation was central to this process, particularly under indirect rule, where colonial authorities used racial and ethnic classifications to make sense of a diverse population. By assigning different ethnic groups specific roles within the labour hierarchy, categorisation allowed those in power to simplify governance, transforming complex social realities into manageable groupings. This process normalised exploitative labour regimes, making inequalities in labour markets seem natural and inevitable.

The use of categorisation not only reinforced labour divisions but also legitimised existing social hierarchies. Dividing Sudanese society into categories—such as Arab, Sudanese, and Fallata, or lighter-skinned elites versus darker-skinned labourers—enabled both external rulers and local elites to maintain economic control. Lighter-skinned groups were often elevated to administrative or political positions, while darker-skinned ones were relegated to exploitative or menial labour. This system of categorisation was not only a tool of control but also a way to produce knowledge that aligned with the interests of those in power, ensuring that marginalised groups remained subordinate. As Tilly’s concept of categorical pairing suggests, this form of division not only facilitated labour exploitation but also entrenched broader social stratification. The strategic use of these classifications continues to shape Sudan’s labour market dynamics today, reinforcing both economic and social inequalities.

In addition to racial and ethnic divisions, the chapter highlights the invisibility of women’s labour throughout Sudanese history. Despite their critical role in the economy—whether through agricultural work, domestic labour, or participation in informal sectors—women’s contributions have often been overlooked or devalued in both historical accounts and formal labour structures. This invisibility is a form of structural violence, where the

contributions of women, particularly in social reproductive labour, are rendered invisible, even though they are central to the functioning of Sudan's labour regimes. As capitalist transformations took root in rural Sudan, women were increasingly confined to unpaid or undervalued work, while men and other family members engaged in wage labour outside the home. This dynamic, reinforced by patriarchal norms and gendered labour divisions, limited women's access to employment opportunities and entrenched their marginalisation within the formal economy.

Arabisation and Islamisation have further compounded these inequalities, particularly since independence. The imposition of Arabic as the language of state employment and the growing influence of Islamic law in labour relations have created structural barriers for non-Arab, non-Muslim, and female workers. Southerners, Christians, and women as a whole faced exclusion from many state jobs due to these religious, linguistic, and gender-based barriers. The processes of Arabisation and Islamisation not only reinforced existing racial and ethnic hierarchies within Sudan's labour markets but also deepened patriarchal control over women's labour, restricting their participation in the formal economy and reinforcing the structural violence that has shaped labour relations throughout Sudan's history.

Finally, this chapter introduces the concept of categorical violence to explain how classification systems—based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender—have been used to perpetuate labour exploitation and inequality. Inspired by Tilly's (1999) framework of categorical inequality, categorical violence reveals how the pairing of social categories with labour roles serves to maintain power hierarchies across generations, and both colonial and post-colonial elites weaponised these classifications to normalise exploitation and violence, embedding them within Sudan's labour regimes. By categorising groups of people into hierarchical pairs—such as 'masters' and 'slaves' or 'productive' and 'non-productive'—these systems not only facilitated control over labour but also ensured that the social and economic violence necessary to sustain these hierarchies became invisible, normalised, and reproduced across generations.

In conclusion, the historical patterns of exploitation and domination—whether through colonial rule, capitalist expansion, or religious and ethnic divisions—have deeply influenced labour regime dynamics and social relations in Sudan. These systems of labour control, built

on categorisation and violence, have perpetuated social hierarchies and entrenched inequalities that continue to shape Sudan's labour market today.

Chapter 5 The Meaning and Organisation of ‘Everyday Work’ in Rural Kordofan Labour Regimes

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how labour in rural Kordofan is classified, characterised, and valued, focusing on the historical and social dynamics that shape both recognised and ‘invisible’ forms of work. Drawing on the historical context of Sudanese labour regimes (O’Brien 1986; Sikainga 1996), the analysis shifts to contemporary labour, including unpaid reproductive work, which remains systematically undervalued and often excluded from formal labour statistics (Bhattacharya 2017; Federici 2021).

Central to this analysis is Tilly’s (1999) framework of categorical inequality, particularly exploitation and adaptation, which explains how social categories such as race, ethnicity, and gender are tied to specific labour roles, thereby reinforcing systemic inequalities. Mechanisms such as opportunity hoarding and emulation are pivotal in Sudan’s labour regimes, with racial and gender hierarchies determining which forms of labour are recognised and valued within formal economic structures.

Elias and Rai’s (2019) Space, Time, and Violence (STV) framework provides a critical lens for understanding how ‘everyday work’, such as social reproductive and informal labour, is central to societal functioning yet systematically devalued. Their work highlights how spatial and temporal dimensions influence the social and economic recognition of labour. For instance, reproductive work within homes remains invisible due to its confinement to private spaces (Picchio 2003), while labour in public spaces gains formal recognition. Time is also critical: unpaid labour, such as caregiving, despite being time-consuming, is excluded from labour statistics due to narrow, profit-driven definitions of work often endorsed by international bodies like the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Bryson 2007).

These spatial and temporal dimensions reveal that the devaluation of reproductive and informal labour constitutes symbolic (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), structural (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b), and everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992). This violence is embedded in economic systems that exploit the labour of women and marginalised groups

without offering recognition or compensation. Reproductive labour, for example, is essential to societal sustenance but remains invisible because it does not align with capitalist definitions of work (Federici 2021; Mezzadri 2019). Similarly, informal market-based or communal labour is devalued due to its association with marginalised groups (Kevane 1994).

The chapter also explores the constructed distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ work (Cole and Booth 2007; Duffy 2007; Hughes 1951) in Kordofan, showing how these are shaped by historical processes, Arab-Islamic ideology, spatial dimension of work, and social norms, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Bernal 1994; Sikainga 1996). Work linked to femininity, domesticity, or vulnerable groups is devalued, while work associated with masculinity—particularly militarised forms of labour in Sudan—or performed in public spaces is accorded greater social and economic significance (Bakker and Silvey 2008; Elson 2015).

By integrating Tilly’s categorical inequality framework with Elias and Rai’s STV lens, the chapter explores how gendered and racialised patterns of everyday work in rural Kordofan are shaped by intersecting inequalities of race, ethnicity, and gender. Labour classifications that associate specific roles with marginalised groups reinforce the exploitation and invisibility of their work, thereby sustaining inequalities within Sudan’s labour regimes. This exploitation and lack of recognition can be understood through the concept of a ‘continuum of violence’ (Bourgois 2004; Cockburn 2009), wherein patterns of exploitation are perpetuated and normalised through the historical marginalisation of their labour.

By examining often-overlooked forms of labour, such as reproductive and informal work, this chapter integrates feminist political economy and labour regime theories to reveal how labour classification and valuation are embedded in social hierarchies and historical context. These frameworks demonstrate that labour classification and valuation is a powerful mechanism generating inequality and exploitation, aligning with the concept of categorical violence. The interconnections between social categories ensure that inequalities are continually reproduced by pairing labour roles with specific social identities. The chapter highlights that these systems of labour classification in Kordofan not only reflect existing hierarchies but actively reinforce the exploitation and marginalisation sustaining Sudan’s broader labour regime dynamics.

5.2 The Work of ‘Not-Work’

5.2.1 Sudanese Women’s ‘Not-Work’ at Policy Level

Sudanese women’s labour has long been rendered invisible and devalued. During fieldwork, especially in rural towns, Sudanese men frequently dismissed the work carried out by female family members as ‘not-work’, a view shared by some women. However, women’s work not only directly supported the capitalist production of their family members but also included paid work. According to the ILO, Sudanese women consistently rank among the lowest in global female labour participation, as shown in Table 6. Modelled estimates for 2019 and 2023 record rates of 28.9% and 29.5%, respectively, placing Sudan 171st out of 189 countries in both years.

Table 6. Countries with the Lowest Female Labour Force Participation Rate

Ranks	Reference area	Year	Value	Reference area	Year	Value
189	Yemen	2019	6.0	Yemen	2023	6.4
188	Iraq	2019	11.5	Iraq	2023	12
187	Jordan	2019	13.6	Jordan	2023	14.9
186	Egypt	2019	15.8	Egypt	2023	15.2
185	Algeria	2019	16.4	Iran, Islamic Republic of	2023	16.1
184	Syrian Arab Republic	2019	16.4	Algeria	2023	16.6
183	Iran, Islamic Republic of	2019	16.9	Syrian Arab Republic	2023	17.1
182	Occupied Palestinian Territory	2019	18.3	Djibouti	2023	18.3
181	Djibouti	2019	18.4	Occupied Palestinian Territory	2023	19.2
180	Somalia	2019	21.1	Somalia	2023	21.2
179	Afghanistan	2019	21.9	Morocco	2023	21.6
178	Morocco	2019	23.0	India	2023	24.1
177	Pakistan	2019	23.4	Pakistan	2023	24.6
176	India	2019	23.7	Mauritania	2023	26.4
175	Saudi Arabia	2019	24.6	Tunisia	2023	26.4
174	Mauritania	2019	26.3	Saudi Arabia	2023	28.1
173	Tunisia	2019	26.5	Nepal	2023	28.8
172	Nepal	2019	28.4	Lebanon	2023	29.3
171	Sudan	2019	28.9	Sudan	2023	29.5
170	Lebanon	2019	29.3	Western Sahara	2023	30.4

ILO Modelled Estimates (2019 & 2023)

These statistics perpetuate a misleading narrative that Sudanese women are less industrious than men and reinforce various categorical pairings of internal and external classifications.

For example, since 19 of the countries listed in Table 6 are predominantly Muslim, these figures may strengthen the association between Muslim-majority developing countries and low female labour force participation, reinforcing the erroneous notion that Islam prohibits women from working outside the home.³¹ Similarly, Table 9, which shows labour participation rate by gender in Sudan and globally, initially appears to support the notion that women, particularly in urban areas, have low labour participation or face high unemployment—dynamics that have long characterised Sudan's unemployment patterns (see Section 3.2.1.3). However, when disaggregated by state, the data reveals that North Kordofan surpasses both the national and rural averages for female labour participation and approaches the global average of 48.7%.

Moreover, when examining employment-to-population ratios by state and gender, western Sudanese states, particularly North Kordofan and Darfur, display higher rates of female employment than other regions, with North Kordofan having the highest female employment-to-population ratio in Sudan (MoHRDL 2014: 57). However, this high rate is largely explained by the prevalence of vulnerable employment. At 72.2%, North Kordofan has the third-highest rate of vulnerable employment in the country, after South Darfur and South Kordofan (MoHRDL 2014: 82), reflecting the precarious nature of work, especially in rural areas. Women in the state may have limited economic options, compelling them to participate in the workforce out of necessity rather than choice. Vulnerable employment, characterised by informal, insecure, and poorly paid jobs, drives female participation. Therefore, the high participation rate does not indicate empowerment but reflects socio-economic pressures that force women to engage in any available work, often unregulated and informal.

³¹ Some sociologists, such as Rizzo et al. (2007), argue that Islam promotes gender inequality and a low female labour participation rate. However, others, such as feminist sociologist and economist, Moghadam (1991) and Doğan (2016), contend that Islam is not the root cause of gender inequality, pointing instead to political and socio-economic inequalities as the primary factors affecting women's labour participation.

Table 7. Labour Participation Rate by Gender in Sudan and the World

	Urban	Rural	North Kordofan	National	World
Female	25.4	30.3	45.7	28.3	48.6
Male	65.9	72.6	78.8	70.1	75.4
National	46.0	52.2	62.2	49.8	62.0

ILO Modelled Estimate

Source for Sudan: Labour Force Survey (2011)

Because of the prevalent use of ILO classifications, which define work solely based on economic remuneration, these statistics only provide a partial understanding of the complex realm of everyday labour. Through first-hand observations in El-Rahad, El-Obeid, and Bahri, it became evident that women and girls were often the most industrious, dedicating the longest hours to social reproductive work, despite it being unrecognised and dismissed as ‘not-work’. Their reproductive labour formed the foundation for capitalist production within and beyond the household. Without their contributions, the paid, profit-oriented work of men and other family members would not have been possible.

The failure of labour surveys to capture reproductive labour is not uncommon, as they typically focus on wage employment in line with international labour classifications. However, some are particularly inadequate at recognising remunerated work that is hidden from mainstream view. To challenge this normalised practice and the notion that Sudanese women’s work is inherently ‘non-existent’, the next section examines the concept of ‘not-work’ in everyday labour by exploring gendered time allocation and unpacking the social constructions underlying this concept.

5.2.2 The Politics of Time: Everyday Life as Social Reproduction

Analysing people's daily time allocation is a crucial starting point for understanding the gendered classification of work, the intersection between time and labour, and the capture of both remunerated and unremunerated women’s work. It highlights that access to disposable time, like other scarce resources, is part of “the politics of ‘who gets what, when, and how’” (Bryson 2007:1). Feminist theorists have recognised time-use surveys (TUS) as significant tools for analysing the “politics of time” (ibid.) and understanding the importance

of social reproduction in women's daily lives (Elias and Rai 2019; Weeks 2011). From the UN-led Beijing Platform for Action for Gender Equality, where TUS was advocated (UN 1996:88), to the World Bank's inclusion of TUS in assessing well-being (Rubiano-Matelevich and Kashiwase 2018), TUS has become a key research tool for international policymakers. Although these surveys aim to understand women's time-based contributions to the national economy, Charmes' (2019) international TUS for the ILO shows that women work longer hours daily but are paid for fewer compared to men. A similar result was observed in El-Rahad locality.

A comparative analysis was conducted on the gendered daily time distribution by activity in Um Laota, a rural village, and El-Rahad Town, a rural town. Um Laota (see Appendix 1) is predominantly inhabited by sesame farmers with shared paternal ancestry, while El-Rahad Town features more diverse labour markets, including agricultural, pastoral, and office work. Time-use data from various families and social groups was used to calculate the average patterns of four groups: rural village women and men, and rural town women and men.

Initially, activities were classified into specific categories, but to capture gendered differences in time-use, particularly regarding paid and unpaid work, these distinctions were prioritised in the classification process. A key challenge was distinguishing between activities that were often carried out simultaneously, such as socialising and leisure, self-care and socialising, or caregiving and other forms of unpaid domestic work. For instance, according to the *International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics* (UN 2016), women collecting firewood (production of goods for own final use) during their commute to work in the sesame field (employment) presents an overlap in activity types. Similarly, classifying activities such as drinking tea (self-care) while socialising after meals also proved difficult. As a result, four broader categories—paid work, unpaid work, leisure and socialising, and self-care—were chosen to emphasise the dynamics around paid and unpaid work. While this classification helped capture gendered disparities, it still could not fully reflect the multiplicity of activities typically engaged in by individuals.

Organising the data by gender and location (rural village or rural town) revealed a similar pattern to Charmes' international findings: women in both rural villages and rural towns dedicated more time per day to unpaid work and less to paid work compared to men. This

trend is depicted in Figure 12, with further gender comparisons in Figures 13 and 14. This gendered division of labour affords men more time for paid work, learning, socialising, leisure, and self-care.

Figure 11. Everyday Time-Use by Gender/Activity/Location in the El-Rahad Locality

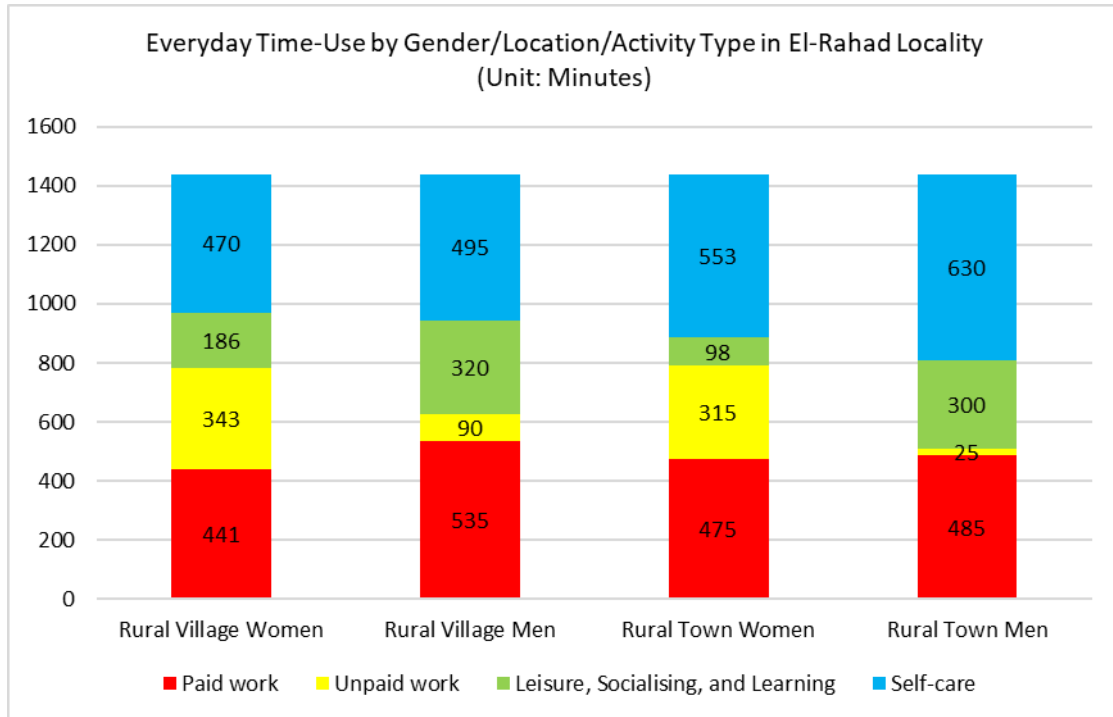


Figure 12. Time-Use by Gender/Activity in El-Rahad Town

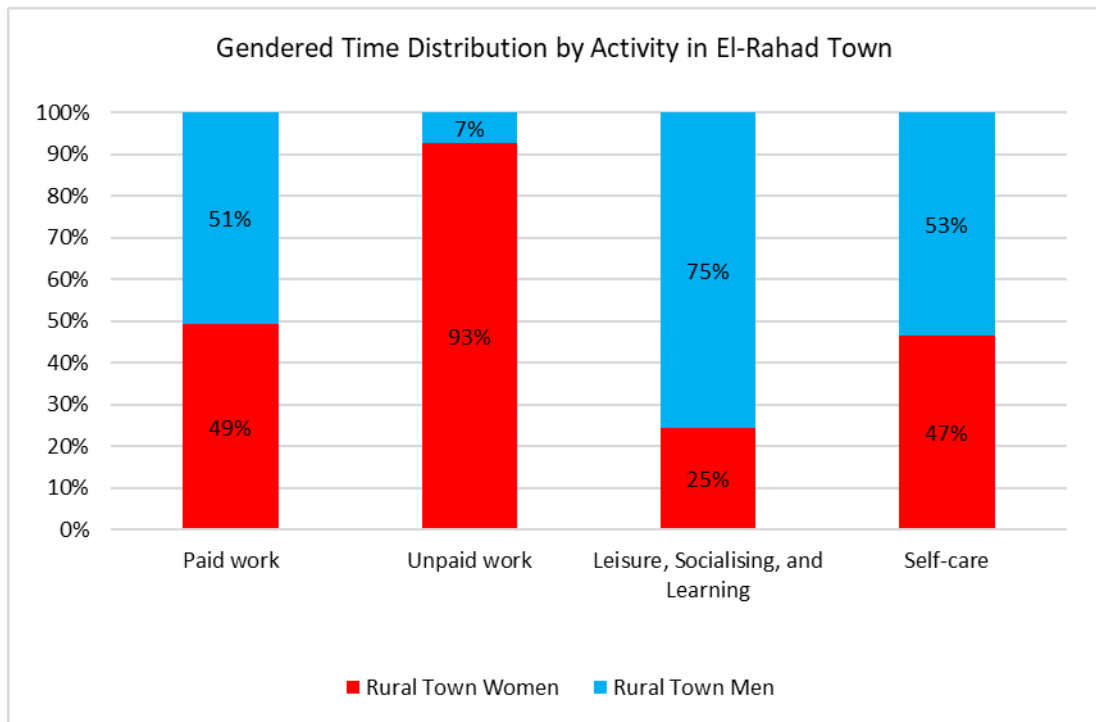
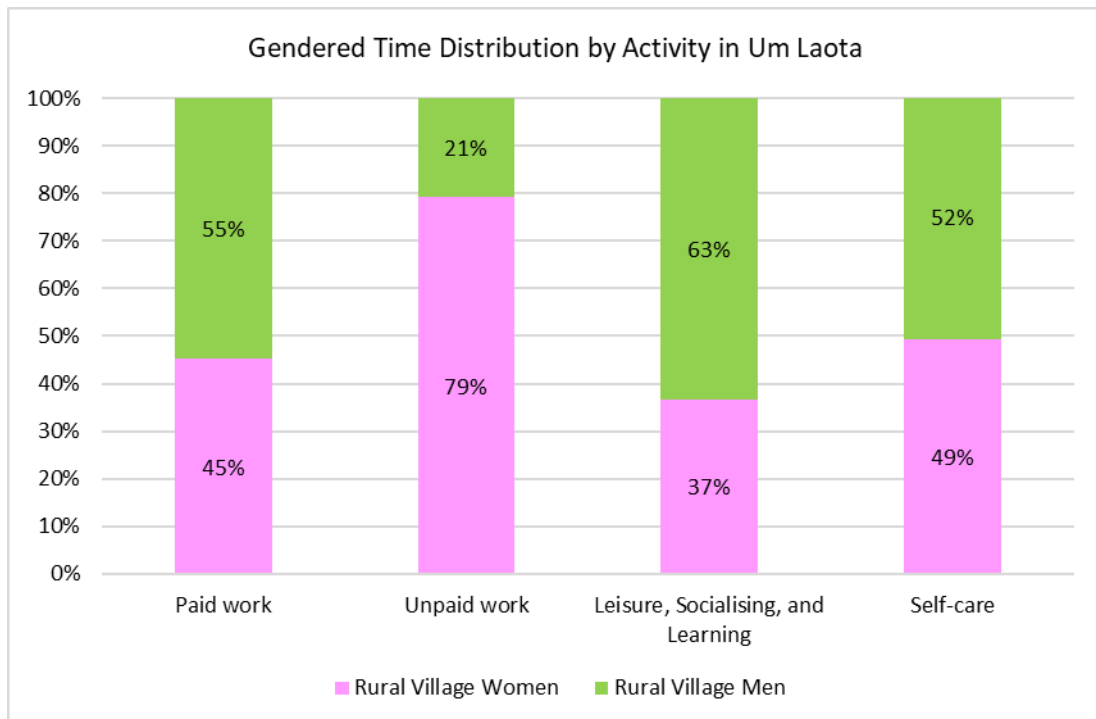


Figure 13. Time-Use by Gender/Activity in Um Laota



The TUS analysis shows both similarities and differences in gendered work patterns across rural village and rural town locations.

5.2.2.1 Similarities

In both settings, unequal gendered patterns of work distribution emerged. As shown in Figures 12-14, women in both locations spent more time overall on work but less on paid work compared to men. In rural villages, women spent 441 minutes on paid work and 343 minutes on unpaid work (784 minutes daily), while men spent 535 minutes on paid work and only 90 minutes on unpaid work (625 minutes daily). Similarly, in rural towns, women devoted 475 minutes to paid work and 315 minutes to unpaid work (790 minutes daily), while men spent 485 minutes on paid work and just 25 minutes on unpaid work (510 minutes daily).

This analysis highlights that although women worked nearly as many paid hours as men, they spent significantly more time on unpaid reproductive labour, such as caregiving and household chores. In El-Rahad Town, there was little difference in the time men and their wives spent on paid work, especially when women had fixed working hours. However, the unequal distribution of unpaid work persisted. As a result, men in both rural villages and rural towns had more time for paid work, socialising, leisure, and self-care. The burden of overwork on women limited their ability to engage in learning, socialising, and leisure, with men in rural towns having triple the time for these activities compared to women, and nearly double the time in rural villages.

5.2.2.2 Difference 1: Inter-Gender Support

Two significant differences in gendered time-use patterns between rural villages and rural towns were observed: inter-gender and inter-generational cooperation. In rural villages, men carried a higher overall workload in collaboration with women compared to their rural town counterparts, reflecting distinct work and family labour dynamics. For instance, rural village women often reduced paid work time to engage in reproductive tasks such as cooking and collecting firewood. Men would leave home slightly earlier for paid work and stay later in the fields, while women returned earlier to handle domestic duties.

In contrast, inter-gender family (or reproductive) work sharing was less common in rural towns, where more women pursued independent jobs outside the home, often far from their residences—for example, women tea sellers, aided by teenage daughters, worked for wages or salaries. For those in office-based or technical roles, such as government administrators or nurses, fixed working hours left little flexibility for sharing paid work with family members. Although collaboration with colleagues occurred, it did not reduce their family responsibilities; after their paid employment finished, these women were still expected to carry out reproductive work at home.

Regardless of professional status, many women remained responsible for domestic duties, such as cooking after work, while other female family members, often at home, handled tasks like cleaning in the absence of domestic helpers. Men, on the other hand, rarely engaged in routine domestic activities, contributing only sporadically to tasks like market shopping or carrying heavy items.

Rural town women, due to their heavier workloads, often employed domestic servants to manage reproductive tasks, a practice less common in rural villages where families managed labour internally. In El-Rahad Town, domestic servants, primarily from the Hausa ethnic group, performed duties such as cleaning, laundry, and water-fetching, while cooking remained the responsibility of female family members. Some wealthier families employed multiple domestic workers, not only due to financial means but also factors like having fewer children or no children at all.

5.2.2.3 Difference 2: Inter-Generation Support

The second difference between rural towns and rural villages pertains to inter-generational cooperation among women in managing domestic work. While the division of domestic labour varied across families and was influenced by social class, rural towns displayed less distinct generational divisions of labour than rural villages.

In contrast, in rural villages, younger girls typically took on heavier family labour, being viewed as more flexible and agile.³² In Um Laota, mothers handled much of the domestic workload, but older daughters were crucial and often seen as 'second mothers'. Some girls, aged 13 and above, were fully responsible for domestic tasks such as preparing breakfast and cleaning. Meanwhile, girls under 13 were expected to focus on school and minor tasks like shopping. However, this division of labour may reflect the 'idealised' perceptions of the female villagers, given that 85% of Um Laota's female participants had no formal education. The daily involvement of women and girls in unpaid family work perpetuated the undervaluation of their time and efforts. This devaluation of women's works as 'not-work' severely limited their opportunities to engage in education and other activities, reinforcing traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures.

In rural towns, it was common to see older women, in their fifties or above, still engaging in physically demanding tasks, such as scrubbing floors, especially in families where younger women had received more education. Daughters in these town settings, particularly from middle-class families, received greater support from their families to prioritise education, allowing them to reduce their involvement in household chores. This support likely stemmed from better access to schools, the family's financial capacity, and recognition of education's importance for future prospects. As a result, these daughters could focus more on their studies and activities outside of traditional domestic responsibilities.

Despite the lack of recognition of unpaid reproductive work, paid employment would not have been possible without the foundation of family labour. This was true in both Um Laota and rural towns like El-Rahad, where families relied heavily on their own labour for daily tasks such as meal preparation and tea. Unlike in developed economies, where outsourcing is common, even wealthier families in El-Rahad preferred to allocate reproductive labour within the family or social circle. This choice reflects more than just a financial calculation; it is closely tied to the idea of femininity in Muslim households, where wives and mothers are seen as nurturers. Women are culturally expected to stay home, and it is often viewed negatively if they 'abandon' household duties, reinforcing a space imbued with symbolic violence.

³² Focus group Interview, girls and women, 12/7/2019.

The classification of activities such as drinking tea or eating blurred the boundaries between self-care and socialising, further complicating the valuation of unpaid labour. Thus, assessing the value of reproductive work goes beyond its market worth, highlighting its deeper social and familial significance.

While this analysis highlights the everyday gendered dynamics of labour, it is important to note that seasonality plays a significant role in shaping these work patterns. A detailed discussion of seasonal variations, particularly in agricultural and pastoral work, is provided in Chapter 6.

5.2.3 Rethinking Labour Productivity

The Time-Use Survey (TUS) findings from El-Rahad families revealed that women were responsible for multitasking most of the unpaid reproductive work while also engaging in paid work, whereas men had minimal involvement in reproductive work, allowing them to focus primarily on paid labour. This gendered disparity in how labour is allocated between what is categorised as productive (paid) and unproductive (reproductive) work raises important questions about labour productivity. Existing theories often frame women's unpaid family work merely as cultural roles (Palacios-López and López 2014) or informal constraints akin to agricultural inputs like access to credit (Peterman et al. 2011). Although some studies from Nigeria recognise women's dual responsibilities in agricultural production and domestic work (Rahman 2009; Umar, Luka, and Rahman 2010), they remain grounded in official classification systems derived from neo-classical economic approaches which fail to recognise unpaid reproductive labour as legitimate work.

The OECD (2018) defines labour productivity as real GDP per hour worked, focusing on the labour and capital inputs of 'employees' to produce specific outputs. According to this definition, women's reproductive work in agricultural production, such as tea-making and preparing lunch, is excluded, despite its direct contribution to each worker's productivity. The invisibility of women's work and the resulting discrimination have been so internalised that female farmers themselves devalue their contributions, which affects how they perceive and report their own productivity.

In group discussions with female farmers in Um Laota, they frequently reiterated that “men are much more productive than women”, often claiming that men were at least twice as productive.³³ When discussing sesame farming processes, the women emphasised the male-dominated stages, such as land clearing and cutting, while minimising the labour-intensive final stages—tasks such as cleaning and bagging—that were primarily carried out by women. These final processes were either overlooked or seen as less important, even though women were often the sole workers during this stage.

Table 8. Declared Labour Productivity of Sesame Farming

The number of days to complete one mokhamas			
Farming Process	2 Women	2 Men	Tractor used?
Land clearing	4	2	
Ridging (sand)	5	2	For sesame and sorghum (doraa)
Ridging (gerdud)	7	4	
Weeding	4.5	3	
Cutting, drying, and maturing	2	1	
Cleaning and Bagging	1**	NA	
*mokhamas is a land measurement used in western Sudan. 1 mokhamas is equivalent to 0.59 feddan, 2,478 square meters, or 0.25 hectares			
**1 day of focused work, sometimes in a form of nafir (communal work party), by "as many women as possible" to avoid thieves			

As shown in Table 8, female farmers identified five main processes in sesame farming: land clearing, ridging (including planting), weeding, cutting, and the final stages of cleaning and bagging. Two women took four days to clear land, compared to two days for two men. For ridging on sandy soil, women took five days, while men completed the task in two. In these tasks, the figures support the claim that men are twice as productive. However, the final stages of cleaning and bagging, which were completed exclusively by women, were not discussed in detail, almost as if their contributions were downplayed or dismissed. This suggests that women may have internalised the idea that these tasks are less important or

³³ Focus Group Discussion, female farmers, 7/9/2019.

not part of 'real' agricultural production, leading to a skewed perception of productivity that overlooks their critical role in the labour process. The belief that men are 'better' at agricultural work is reinforced not only at the village level but also by international organisations. For instance, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) selects only boys as tractor drivers, reinforcing gender biases—symbolic violence—that frame women as less capable of operating machinery. This assumption excludes women from mechanised agricultural work, despite many female farmers expressing both the desire and ability to drive tractors. While mechanisation may reduce the time men spend on farming, it does not necessarily result in a redistribution of unpaid reproductive labour. Women (are forced to) continue using traditional farming methods and as well as bearing the burden of long hours of domestic work—an example of structural violence—while men benefit from technology that reduces their agricultural workload.

It could also be argued that men's productivity in any of these production stages might significantly decrease if they were solely responsible for reproductive work at home. If men had to prepare their own meals, make tea, and manage household chores, their so-called productive work hours would likely be reduced, and tasks would take longer to complete. Hence, the distinction between types of work is socially constructed rather than stemming from an inherent gender-based difference in labour ability. Thus, the concept of labour productivity, and who is deemed responsible for agricultural operations, is not entirely based on economic calculation but is also socially constructed. This contributes to reinforcing and widening existing gender inequalities. The imposition of categorisations that undervalue women's work reflects categorical violence, in which symbolic and structural forms of violence shape perceptions of women's work as less productive. If this leads to women receiving less work or pay based on these assumptions, it becomes a form of structural violence, perpetuating discrimination and inequality.

5.2.4 Nafir: Men's Unpaid Work and the Abuse of Communal Solidarity

While (nearly all) women face daily discrimination in their unpaid reproductive work, some men, particularly those lower in the social hierarchy, also experience domination and inequality through their participation in *nafir*. Nafir refers to communal labour-intensive

tasks, such as agricultural work and construction. While women also participated in nafir in rural Kordofan (see Table 8 note), men were more frequently involved in building mosques³⁴ or specific sections of houses,³⁵ as well as agricultural activities.³⁶ Among the Nuba people of Kordofan, nafir is the second most important form of labour after family work (Nadel 1947). It promotes communal solidarity and mutual assistance, and is rooted in reciprocal relations from medieval Sudan (Ewald 1990:79).

However, in El-Rahad, powerful men often abused the nafir system, requesting it multiple times within a season, while economically vulnerable men could not afford to make any requests, as they could not afford to provide the expected tea and, in some cases, meals to thank participants for their assistance. This imbalance resulted in heavier workloads for the less powerful, who were often denied the expected reciprocity of meals or mutual participation. When questioned about this inequity, many simply said, “They are powerful men, so they receive more than us”.³⁷ The unequal distribution of unpaid communal labour in nafir aligns with Kevane’s (1994) findings in Sheikan locality, where wealthy men would call for nafir, but poorer men rarely did. Kevane observed that nafir served as a cost-effective alternative to hiring wage labour and had a strong social dimension, benefiting the wealthier men.

The nafir system was also exploited by the Ingaz regime for financial gain. During Haroun’s governorship under El-Bashir, North Kordofan citizens were asked to ‘donate’ towards the state’s ‘renaissance’ project, which drew on the concept of nafir. Many groups, particularly businessmen, saw this ‘donation’ as a form of forced taxation:³⁸ for example, this project included contributions of 20% of the cost toward building a road between Khartoum and El-Obeid.³⁹ However, after completion, the road was rendered impassable due to poor design and mismanagement of funds. Despite the large sums collected, it was widely known that Haroun kept no financial records, avoiding documentation to conceal fund misappropriation.⁴⁰ The Ingaz government abused people's generosity in the name of

³⁴ Interview, Ibrahim, 15/7/2019.

³⁵ Interview, Saadullah, 26/8/2019.

³⁶ Interview, Yousef, 13/7/2019, Sheikh Omar, 14/7/2019.

³⁷ Interview, Ibrahim, 15/7/2019.

³⁸ Interview, Wael, 29/8/2019.

³⁹ Interview, Yahya, 20/2/2019.

⁴⁰ Interview, Ekram, 12/9/2019; Mohammed, 29/8/2019.

communal solidarity, engaging in corruption and symbolising the everyday domination of El-Bashir's authoritarian regime (Mahé 2020:3).

Unpaid work, whether reproductive or communal, carries significant social importance for both women and men. In reproductive labour, men often exploit this work by undervaluing women's contributions, benefiting from the classification of women's work as not-work. This classification allows men to exploit reproductive labour while maintaining the cultural expectation that men's income alone should provide for the family, thereby reinforcing masculine prestige.

In nafir, poorer men also suffer from the abuse of wealthier men, who disproportionately benefit by calling on nafir multiple times, leaving poorer men—who cannot afford to reciprocate—with heavier workloads. This dynamic is socially constructed, reinforcing power imbalances within the community. The manipulation of nafir by powerful men upholds their social dominance over poorer men, just as the classification of women's work as not-work reinforces gender inequalities.

Both the exploitation of women's reproductive work and the manipulation of nafir reflect categorical violence, in which symbolic and structural forms of violence devalue the contributions of both women and poorer men. This violence perpetuates power imbalances and inequality, sustaining the social hierarchies that benefit the powerful.

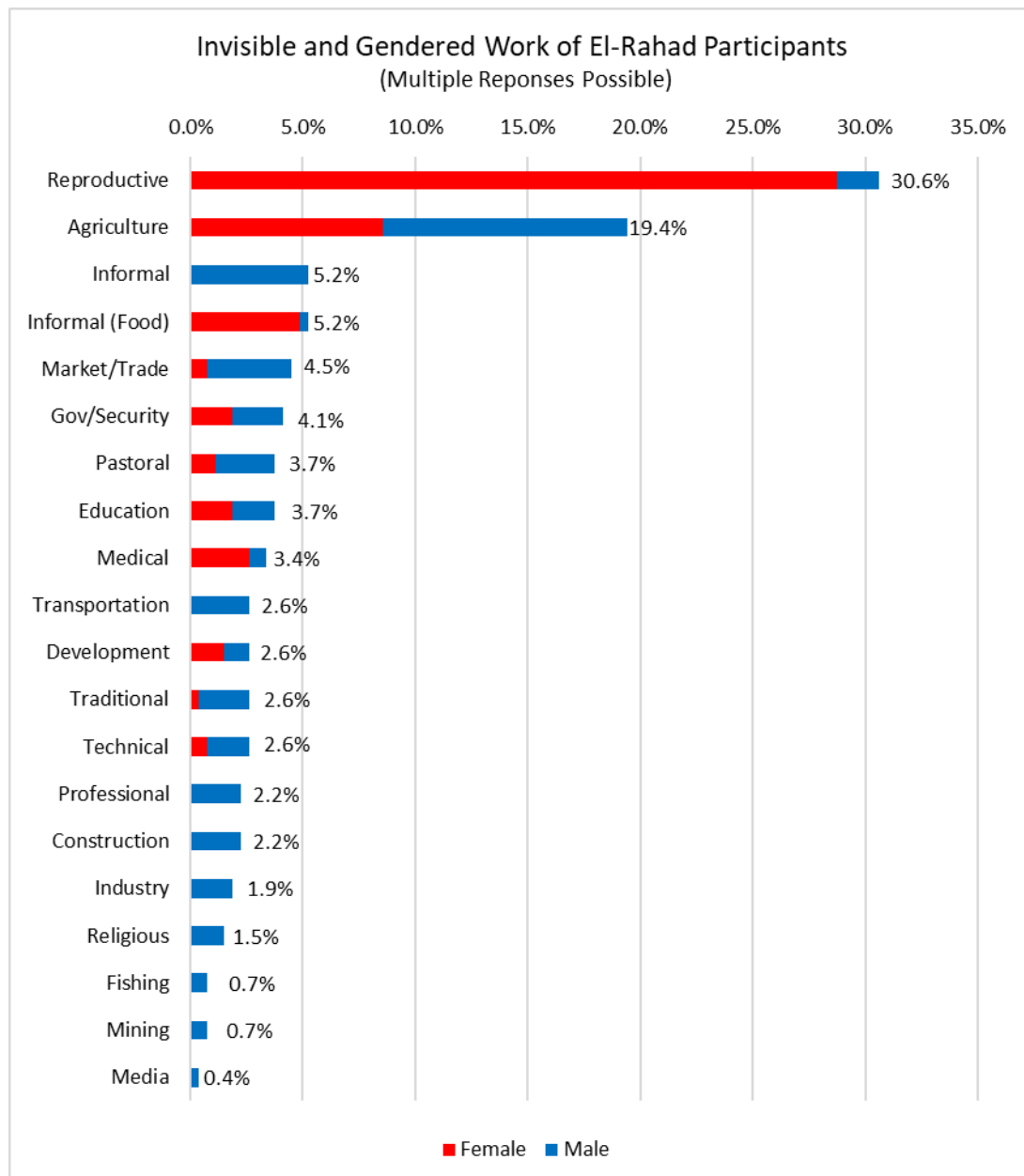
5.3 Classification of Everyday Work in El-Rahad

5.3.1 Understanding 'Invisible' Work Groups

The focus on social dynamics in classifying work within families extends to examining work categorisation at the community level. By allowing participants to self-identify their occupations without limiting the number of roles declared, and by categorising work using TUS, this section uncovers the diverse range of work in rural Kordofan that large-scale surveys, such as the Sudan Labour Force Survey (SLFS), often overlook. Unlike the SLFS, which restricts occupational declarations, this study adopts a broader approach to reveal discrepancies in data and to identify 'invisible' work groups that contribute to sustaining Kordofan's daily life but generally go unrecognised.

This approach aligns with broader scholarly efforts, such as those by Enria (2018), Standing (2011, 2018), Fraser (2016), and Elson (1995) who critique traditional surveys for failing to capture the complexity and contributions of informal labour and social reproductive labour. Figure 15 illustrates the participants' self-declared work classifications by gender.

Figure 14. Self-Declared Work Classification by Gender



The self-classification of work through the TUS identified 20 work groups—two more than the SLFS.⁴¹ Unlike the SLFS findings (MoHRDL 2014), which identified North Kordofan’s dominant sector as agriculture (66%) followed by trade (10%), this analysis found reproductive work (paid and unpaid) to be the dominant sector, accounting for 30.6% of responses. Despite its importance, reproductive work has often been overlooked and seen as an “invisible and mysterious occupation” due to its association with private homes (Elobeid 2016:1).

I decided to list another newly identified occupation group in the top five—informal—as two distinct categories to reflect the gendered nature and differences in the types of work. The all-male informal category primarily comprised portering, agriculture, construction, and transportation. Despite potentially falling under previously identified categories, participants specifically characterised their work as ‘informal’, reflecting their own understanding of the labour they performed. Similarly, the majority-female informal (food) category included occupations such as tea ladies, alcohol producers, and food vendors. While some of these roles could be classified under Manufacturing or Accommodation and Food Service Activities in the ISIC, the women also classified their work as informal, shaped by their own experiences and interactions with labour regimes and authorities.

Interestingly, despite being categorised as informal workers, many of these rural workers, especially the female tea ladies, regularly paid taxes to the local government. Too often, informal workers are assumed to be tax evaders (Rogan 2019). In reality, they do pay taxes, while some formal workers may evade larger sums of taxes, as seen in cases such as the Panama Papers (Obermaier and Obermayer 2017). These rural workers’ categorisation of their work as informal stems from the negative treatment they have received from law enforcement and tax collectors, positions historically dominated by men of Northern Riverain tribes (Section 4.3.1.2). Female informal workers, such as tea ladies, are also subject to everyday violence of (sexual) harassment by some customers (see Section 5.4.2.1), and their internalisation of such trauma also pushes them to devalue their work as informal. Their characterisation is socially constructed and has very little to do with their

⁴¹ The SLFS listed 22 occupational groups; however, the bottom four groups had no data, even though there were people engaged in them.

actual status as informal workers, highlighting prevailing stereotypes and biases in the classification of work.

In addition to these two groups, my analysis identified two other significant work categories: pastoral and traditional. The pastoral category, which includes those involved in livestock farming, is typically classified under Agriculture, as shown in Table 1. However, capturing comprehensive data on pastoralists is challenging due to their nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles, which make them difficult to track. Large-scale survey methods often fail to account for the dynamic and seasonal nature of their work, leaving their labour contributions underrepresented despite their significant role in Kordofan's labour markets.

The traditional category includes traditional leaders and *el-hakkamat*, folk poetesses primarily found in western Sudan, especially among the Baggara community (Musa 2018). These individuals recite poems to rally communities during various events. In the ISIC classification, they may fall under Other Service Activities, but only if they receive payment and identify this as one of their two major occupations. The work of *el-hakkamat*, despite its significant influence in Kordofan communities, often remains invisible as they typically do not receive payment for their services.

Traditional leaders, or native administration leaders as the government calls them, such as *nazir* or *wakeel* (for the deputy), who represent major ethnic groups, are typically male and often receive a government salary for these roles.⁴² However, they frequently have primary occupations (e.g., doctor, professor) and may not declare their leadership roles as work, particularly if they distance themselves from the Islamist government.

The process of self-classifying work in El-Rahad revealed previously unrecognised forms of labour, showcasing a broader diversity of work beyond that captured by national surveys. This approach not only identified a wider range of work categories but also provided insights into how individuals perceive and position their labour within the local labour regimes. By allowing people to self-identify and classify their work, a more nuanced understanding of the local labour landscape emerged, challenging existing categories and revealing the subjective meanings individuals attribute to their own labour activities. This process is

⁴² Interview, Hakim, 5/5/2019.

particularly valuable in understanding the relational aspects of work, as some groups feel devalued, and their everyday work stories reflect labour-based discrimination and gender-based exploitation, which shape the devaluation of their work. Just as the act of categorisation is both social and political (Foucault 1973), these workers have internalised dominant views, adopting and perpetuating those views in ways that further oppress their own labour.

5.3.2 Occupational Segregation by Gender and Class

5.3.2.1 *'Women's Work'*

The analysis of work organisation in Kordofan highlights a distinct division of labour along gender and class lines. While this thesis critiques the dualism of categorising work as that of 'women' or 'men', this section uses such terms to underscore the significant role gender plays in the division and organisation of everyday work. As shown in Figure 15, Kordofan's labour markets exhibit a pronounced pattern of "occupational sex-typing" (Cohn 1985:3), akin to Tilly's (1999) mechanism of categorical pairing. For instance, 94% of reproductive work is carried out by women, with nearly all female participants involved in it as a primary, secondary, or tertiary occupation. A closer look at these dynamics reinforces findings from Section 5.2: regardless of their external employment's professionalism or remuneration, women still bear the burden of reproductive labour, a responsibility not shared by men, significantly shaping gender roles in the labour market.

Government, Education, and Medical Professions

Other popular work categories among educated middle-class women include government, education, and medical professions. Several factors drive their preference for these jobs. Firstly, in conservative Muslim society, teaching and nursing are among the few professions considered appropriate for women (Tripp 2006:172) (see Section 2.5). In labour markets shaped by the Muslim Brotherhood's influence, women already face challenges in working alongside men (see Section 4.6.1, 5.4.4 and Chapter 6). Furthermore, these jobs hold high social prestige and align with Islamic values, maintaining the status of educated middle-class

women within Sudanese society. Secondly, these occupations offer stability and are perceived as more manageable alongside reproductive work. In El-Rahad, most jobs in these sectors are linked to public institutions, with private hospitals or schools being scarce. Although government jobs may not provide high salaries, they offer benefits such as maternity leave, which is still not common in the private sector. Moreover, these women often have husbands who provide financial support, allowing them to prioritise roles that align with their ideals of being good Muslim wives, even if it means accepting lower pay.

Informal (Food) Sector

Among the least educated lower- and lower-middle-class women, the informal (food) sector, as discussed in Section 5.3.1, is particularly popular. Jobs like tea-making and alcohol production extend reproductive labour into the marketplace, explaining why these occupations are predominantly feminised. Despite reproductive labour being seen as 'not-work', this sector is in high demand. Years of reproductive work at home provide women with valuable skills, making their transition into paid informal work smoother, and their contributions hold monetary value despite typically being unpaid at home.

Most women in this particular group belong to specific social categories: marginalised ethnic groups with histories of conflict, classified racially as African even if they self-identify as Arab, often lacking formal education beyond primary level, and having experienced the loss or abandonment of main male figures in their families. These women face multiple social stigmas, and their jobs, which are highly visible in the marketplace, expose them to a high risk of sexual harassment. Even those working from home, such as alcohol producers, who are Christian and should be exempt from alcohol prohibition, still face harassment from security personnel. Women in this group are subjected to daily instances of male harassment in their workplaces precisely because of their lower social status, reinforced by their professions.

A brief wage analysis reveals an intriguing aspect of this class division. While tea ladies are often perceived as the poorest in the informal economy, typically with IDP backgrounds and limited work opportunities (Kurcz 2019), wage data shows they earn significantly more than educated middle-class women in government jobs. Tea ladies in El-Rahad can earn between

8,000-12,000 SDG per month, compared to the 2,000-4,000 SDG earned by middle-class women in office jobs. Despite the challenging conditions and negative stigma attached to the work, many women choose these roles for the higher income, though they lack social security benefits such as sick or maternity leave. Many tea ladies are sole breadwinners, supporting entire families. Some proudly shared how their earnings helped send their children to university, showing that, despite the hardships, tea work offers economic opportunities that many office-based jobs do not.

5.3.2.2 *'Men's Work'*

Just as gender and class shaped 'women's jobs', they similarly influenced 'men's jobs', albeit with some differences. In El-Rahad's labour markets, men had a broader presence across various paid work sectors, while women tended to concentrate in specific fields. Even in sectors with higher female participation, such as Medical and Education, men predominantly held senior, higher-paying positions. For example, while women made up 78% of the medical workforce, men dominated roles such as doctors and x-ray technicians, leaving women in lower-paid roles like midwives, nurses, or sisters (nurses with additional training).

A similar pattern emerged in the education sector, where men held headmaster or director positions, while women were mostly non-managerial teachers. However, as with women's jobs, men in these senior roles were typically educated middle-class individuals.

Men also dominated several other sectors, including security, market/trade, traditional, technical, construction, industry, religious, fishing, mining, and media. In the government/security sector, roles such as police and NISS positions were exclusively male, while non-security governmental roles, such as local administration, were filled primarily by educated middle-class or upper-middle class women. These sectoral and internal gender divisions highlight how notions of masculinity and femininity shape labour markets.

Interestingly, men's dominance in the workforce did not always correlate with higher education levels compared to women. In office workplaces, particularly in government settings, women were often more educated and from more affluent backgrounds, while

men came from diverse social groups, some with lower levels of education. In contrast, in informal sectors, women often lacked formal education, while men generally had higher educational attainment. This reflects a family-based priority in schooling boys over girls. However, the Ingaz regime's liberalisation of education, combined with weak labour market demand, left many educated men working in informal sectors or unemployed.

For women to work in office settings, they often needed higher education and more advantageous social positioning than men. Only women from respected families with higher education levels were able to work alongside men in these settings, and they faced higher barriers and stricter societal expectations to prove their qualifications.

Many men from agricultural families in El-Rahad were absent from interviews due to their involvement in seasonal work or labour migration. Young men often migrated to cities like Khartoum or El-Obeid during the dry season, or engaged in year-round employment in the army, security forces, or gold mining in South Kordofan or River Nile states. In pastoral families, men often travelled with livestock for wages or family business. This extended labour migration, common among men, contrasted with the more static roles of female participants in El-Rahad.

5.3.2.3 Women as Second-Class Workers and Gendered Wage Inequality

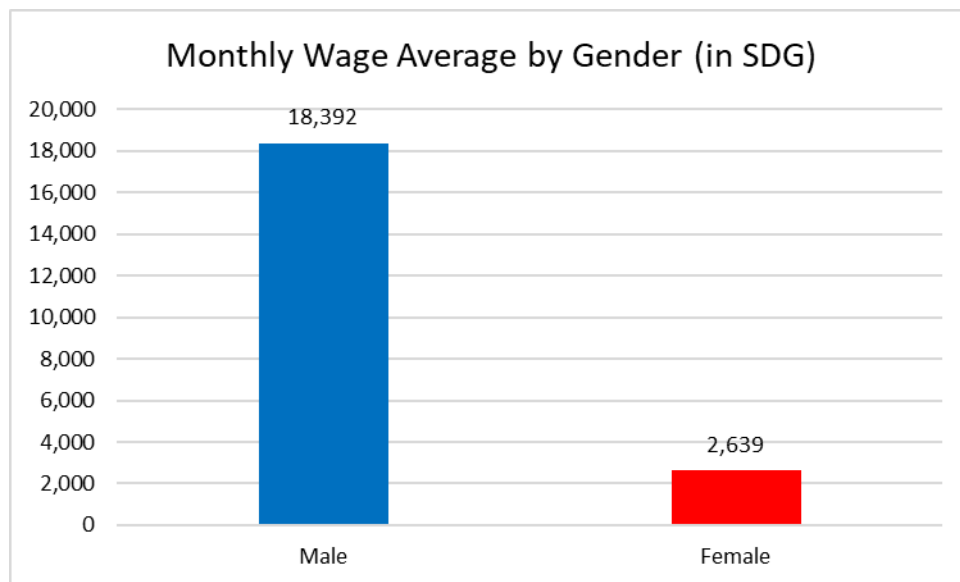
The analysis of work organisation in El-Rahad sheds light on the divisions within labour markets in Sudan, highlighting the significant roles played by gender, class, and ethnicity. Despite the TUS indicating that women work longer hours than men, much of their work remains invisible due to the classification standards used in large-scale surveys such as the SLFS. By approaching the analysis from the standpoint of 'not-work', this study explores the reasons behind the classification and definition of work, focusing particularly on women's reproductive work carried out at home.

The concept of 'not-work' is closely linked to invisibility, illustrating the diverse, multifaceted, and fluid nature of labour markets in Kordofan, which extends beyond the scope of the SLFS. Within the invisible work categories, women dominate two of the top three groups: reproductive and informal (food). The invisibility of women's work permeates

other domains, such as office settings, where mechanisms of emulation and adaptation (Tilly 1999) reinforce gender hierarchies. Women face higher expectations than men to establish their presence in shared workplaces, reflecting a gender-based hierarchy where women hold a secondary status. However, these statuses are influenced by intersecting social factors such as class, ethnicity, and race.

This gendered division sustains and perpetuates existing inequalities. Harman (1976:139) argues that gender-based job segregation in capitalist societies is a primary mechanism reinforcing male dominance by enforcing lower wages for women. This leads to pronounced wage inequality.

Figure 15. El-Rahad Wage Average by Gender



As shown in Figure 16, there is a significant wage gap between genders. Men earn a monthly average of 18,392 SDG, while women receive only 2,639 SDG, roughly 14% of the average male wage. These figures do not include unpaid reproductive work, further highlighting how women consistently earn less than men, even when only paid work is considered. The wage data reflects average monthly income based on varying work hours rather than fixed salaries. Although a breakdown by hourly wages could offer further insights, the focus on monthly wages reflects the realities of informal and reproductive work in Kordofan, where gathering consistent data on work hours is particularly challenging.

Women in El-Rahad, El-Obeid, and Bahri bear the burden of unpaid, invisible reproductive work. Balancing family obligations with paid employment limits their ability to focus on jobs, making it difficult to transition to better-paid positions. Unlike men, who benefit from social networks through communal labour activities such as *nafir* and have more opportunities to engage socially (see Figure 12), women have fewer chances to learn about or secure higher-paying jobs (see Chapter 6).

The barriers that impede women from accessing better-paid jobs, along with the undervaluation of women's work, unequal distribution of unpaid family work, and specific limitations surrounding women's work, have all contributed to the justification for lower wages and the lack of recognition of women's contributions, particularly their reproductive labour, the most crucial form of labour in society. The examination of invisible work, the gendered categorisation of work, and the diverse and multifaceted nature of everyday labour in El-Rahad have shed light on the socially constructed definitions and classifications of work. This sets the stage for the next section, where the focus shifts to understanding how the opposing concepts of 'good/dream' and 'bad/dirty' work have been constructed and defined in rural Kordofan.

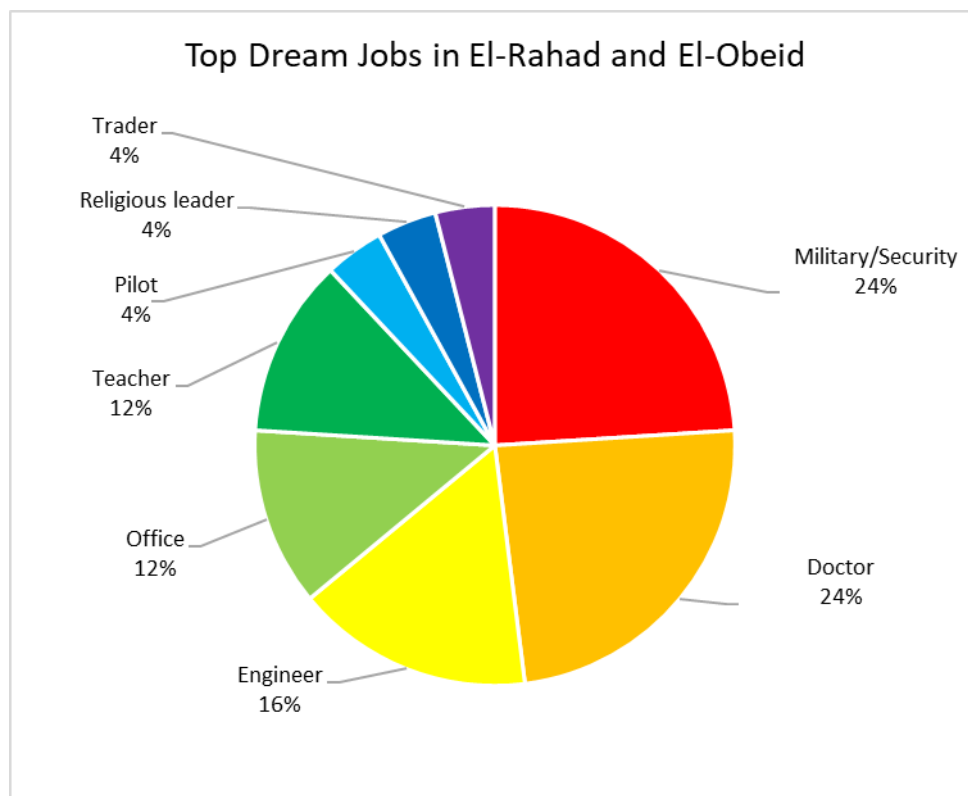
5.4 Work as a Weapon: Paternal Masculinity at the Centre of Work Characterisation

In this section, I expand upon Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical pairing to explore how the notions of 'good/dream' and 'bad/dirty' work (Cole and Booth 2007; Duffy 2007; Hughes 1951) are socially constructed and interconnected with external categories such as gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and race. Building on the understanding that the classification of work is a social construct, this section investigates how these classifications, much like those of 'not-work' and invisible work, are shaped by broader social factors. The section begins by exploring broad patterns in the categorisation of good/dream work, providing a detailed analysis of military/army work as a prominent example, before shifting to the examination of bad/dirty work, with a focus on the symbolic roles of tea ladies and alcohol producers.

5.4.1 Dream/Good Work: Colonial Imagination, Socio-Economic Mobility and Space of Work

During discussions about the meaning of work, the notions of ‘good/dream’ and ‘bad/dirty’ work frequently surfaced. Just as reproductive labour is unequally distributed between genders (Section 5.2), societal ideals around masculinity and femininity play a significant role in shaping these perceptions of work. In medieval Sudan, the rise of merchant capitalism and the slave trade elevated trader/trading to a highly esteemed profession (Section 4.2.3.1), as traders wielded both power and wealth. Continuing from these socio-historical contexts, the concept of dream/good work in Sudan has long been tied to professions traditionally dominated by men. These occupations—military/security, doctors, engineers, teachers, and office work—symbolise power, economic stability, social mobility, and masculinity. Their association with ‘good’ work reflects the historical processes, such as colonisation, violent conflicts, and societal values, that promote roles such as helping others. Where the work is done—its spatial reference—often also matters to the evaluation of work as good, for example if it is based in office or places of authority. Figure 17 below shows top ‘dream/good’ jobs declared by the participants.

Figure 16. Top Dream Jobs in El-Rahad and El-Obeid



Survey results from El-Rahad and El-Obeid show that military/security and doctor ranked as the top dream jobs, each chosen by 24% of respondents. Engineer followed at 16%, with office jobs and teacher at 12% each, and pilot, religious leader, and trader at 4% each. These findings align with research among second-generation Sudanese in Finland, where professions such as doctors, teachers, and engineers were also top choices (Niemi 2012:29). This suggests deep-rooted preferences within Sudanese society, often passed through intergenerational influence. Some second-generation respondents mentioned that these professions were also their parents' dream jobs, further highlighting the family's role in shaping occupational aspirations.

These professions, such as doctors, carry colonial connotations of power, authority, and modernity, amplified by the Sudanese people's genuine desire to have a positive impact. For example, medical services in Sudan during the British colonial period were provided by the Royal Army Medical Corps and recruits from Syrian medical schools before the establishment of the Sudan Medical Department and Sudan Medical Service (Elhadd 2020). The British administration also played a significant role in health research and operations in Sudan (Elsayed 2004), and European Christian missionaries, who operated in South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, often served as medical doctors (Bartholet 2013; Fraser 1938).

Doctor, as a profession, was popular among both female and male participants, partly due to its compatibility with Islamic ideals of feminine work in health care. Participants from poorer neighbourhoods, particularly the Nuba, expressed the highest preference for this profession, likely reflecting their exposure to the authority and influence of doctors through their experiences of state violence, civil wars, and everyday structural violence.

Engineer, another top choice, appealed primarily to boys and men, a preference dating back to the colonial period, when science courses were limited to boys (Ibrahim 1994:196). Dr Komey noted that the lasting image of British engineers working at desks, studying maps, and giving orders profoundly influenced the perception of 'good' work in post-colonial

Sudan.⁴³ As a result, many engineering graduates expected to immediately assume positions of authority upon graduation.

Teacher, another popular profession, was central to British colonial efforts to 'modernise' Sudan through education (Seri-Hersch 2019): many respondents in El-Rahad praised the perceived quality of British teachers and education during colonial rule, despite the harm associated with it.⁴⁴ This nostalgia for British education, reinforced by the decline in education quality under the El-Bashir regime (Section 4.6.3), shaped the aspirations of younger generations.

Interestingly, office work—chosen mainly by women from modest family backgrounds—was the only response that specified a work setting rather than a profession. For women engaged in labour-intensive outdoor work, such as farming or caretaking, the idea of working indoors as a teacher, nurse, or in another office setting represented an ideal. This preference relates to Elias and Rai's (2019) STV framework, which sees spatial and temporal dimensions as key factors in how work and violence intersect with power. In this case, the most popular dream jobs involve indoor workspaces and positions of authority, reflecting a desire for environments that signify power and status, almost akin to what Foucault (1973) describes as episteme—where certain spaces represent not only different physical conditions but also sites of knowledge production and authority. In Kordofan, where outdoor work is physically taxing, indoor professions are valued for the comfort, security, and prestige they offer. Thus, these professions are perceived as dream jobs not only for their colonial associations but also because they distance individuals from harsh environmental conditions and provide a sense of empowerment and protection from everyday violence.

5.4.2 Islamist Militarisation and Fragile Masculinity

This section examines one of the two most popular work choices: military/security work. Like the professions of doctor, engineer, and teacher, military/security work carries colonial legacies, social prestige, and offers some degree of economic security. However, unlike

⁴³ Interview, Dr Komey, University of Bahri, 11/2/2019.

⁴⁴ Interview, Hawa, 1/9/2019.

civilian professions popular across different social groups, including the Sudanese diaspora (Niemi 2012), military/security work has not been widely recognised in the literature despite its centrality in Sudanese labour history. As Willis (2023) argues, "Sudan's entire history has been dominated by soldiers and the violence and corruption they bring". In Sudan, guns speak as loudly as money, symbolising authority and power through professions such as trader, doctor, and engineer.

As discussed in Section 4.4.3, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) are a colonial construct that began under British and Egyptian supervision. Already a dominant warrior class, through the process of 'Sudanisation', Northern Riverain tribesmen came to dominate officer ranks, while soldier ranks were filled by diverse groups, notably the Nuba, South Sudanese, and Baggara, who historically acted as slave raiders. Today, these groups still represent the bulk of SAF soldiers, as noted by a lecturer from El-Rahad.⁴⁵ During El-Bashir's rule, the declared jihad against Christians and rebels in the peripheries led to a militarised school curriculum that rationalised civil wars and glorified military service.⁴⁶

5.4.2.1 *Ustaz Hassan: Army Officer*

Of the respondents who selected the military/security category, 83% were male, and nearly half were aged over 50. The Nuba ethnic group had the highest representation, followed by the Jaalyin, one of the Northern Riverain tribes, and the Gawamaa. A notable participant exemplifying this category was Ustaz Hassan, a Christian Nuba male who had been a retired teacher and former SPLM civilian leader:

My dream was to become an officer in the Sudanese army. I wanted to go to military college. Father was a soldier during the First [Sudanese Civil] War. I like it, by God! I would die to be an officer...the image of it, the appearance of the uniform, music, and status.... More respect goes to soldiers than any university graduates. You see how it is in recent demonstrations.⁴⁷ You can be a graduate, but even if you do not have a car, you can be respected for being an officer.

⁴⁵ Correspondence, Bashir Elshariff, Omdurman Islamic University, 21/3/2023.

⁴⁶ Interview, Um Kultum, 24/4/2019.

⁴⁷ The army initially took the side of the civilians who demanded the ousting of El-Bashir in the Sudanese Revolution in 2019. Their siding with civilians was, however, short-lived as seen in the rocky transition period after the Revolution.

Ustaz Hassan's aspiration to join the SAF may seem contradictory, given the violent history between the SAF and his former organisation, the SPLM, which had caused the deaths of many Nuba civilians, including his own family members.⁴⁸ However, this desire can be understood within the context of the Islamist militarisation era, during which Sudanese schools were steeped in military propaganda that rationalised civil wars and glorified the role of the military (Breidlid 2013; Mohammed 1993). This rationalisation of military may have also permeated Ustaz Hassan's everyday family conversations, given that his father was a soldier in the SAF. As Niemi (2012) highlights, family plays a significant role in shaping occupational aspirations within Sudanese households. It is therefore plausible that Ustaz Hassan's understanding of a 'good job' was informed by his father's military role. However, unlike his father, he aspires to become an officer, seeking a position of higher rank and status.

Ustaz Hassan also shared how his own students, who became SPLA soldiers, insulted him because he was "just a civilian".⁴⁹ This reflects the hyper-romanticisation of military power during violent conflict and the masculine ideals attached to it, which override and dismantle the generation-based social hierarchy, where older people typically receive more respect from the young, especially in the traditional teacher-student relationship. The image of the military officer as a heroic warrior remains a potent symbol of masculinity, embodying qualities such as aggression, courage, violence, and the readiness to sacrifice—idealised traits of masculinity (Morgan 1994:165–66).

Similar to how Sudanese peasants once aspired to become the very merchants who oppressed them (Section 4.2.3.3), perhaps not out of revenge but possibly due to an internalisation of the idealised image of their oppressors, Ustaz Hassan's contradictory desire to join the SAF reflects a symbolic acceptance of this ideal. This acceptance was shaped by his exposure to militarist propaganda, the masculine prestige attached to military power, and his father's role as a soldier—factors that collectively reinforced his aspiration to embody the ideal of the heroic military officer, even if it meant denying his own experience as a civilian and former target of state violence.

⁴⁸ This pattern of seeking a more powerful job even if the job represents 'enemy' has been historically repeated as seen in the case of poor farmers wanting to transition into trading (see Section 4.2.3.3).

⁴⁹ Interview, Ustaz Hassan, 21/4/2019. The SPLA is the army faction of the SPLM.

5.4.2.2 Jamal: Ex-Police Security Officer in Cairo

Another life history highlights the profound impact of Islamist militarism, racial and ethnic discrimination, and Sudan's political and economic instability on the construction of dream work and professional aspirations. I met Jamal, a 30-year-old Nuba Muslim man, along with his two labourer friends, at the home of Akoi, a female Christian Dinka alcohol producer, where they were waiting to buy alcohol. When asked about his work, Jamal replied:

I am an ex-policeman from a family of all policemen. I now work as a contractor in an Egyptian security company based in Cairo. I love my job very much because of the financial stability. I got the job through a brother and a friend who had already worked in the industry and lived in Nasr City [Cairo]. We have a canteen with free food, you can eat as much as you want. I eat with my Egyptian and Somali colleagues. I have all the benefits, like free subsidised housing and health check-ups. I receive 3,500 Egyptian pounds monthly in cash [equivalent to 9,800 SDG], and a salary delay only happened once, just for a few days. I send my salary to my family in El-Rahad through a friend. I don't really care about different exchange rates...the only reason I work so hard is to support my family. If you don't work, you cannot support them, and there is nothing more shameful than that!

Jamal's indifference to foreign exchange rates—an issue of great concern in Sudan—and his friends' surprised expressions suggested he was embellishing the story. My research assistant later confirmed that Jamal's account was fabricated, and I subsequently learned that he had fathered a child with Akoi without being married, despite having a family elsewhere. His actual employment status fluctuated between daily labour and periods of unemployment, much like his friends, a common pattern in agricultural labour markets of El-Rahad. However, instead of dismissing his story entirely, I viewed it as a fantasy version of his life. As Fujii (2010) notes, inventions and falsehoods can offer insight into the narrator's mindset, aspirations, and desires, especially in contexts shaped by war and violence.

Jamal's account reveals his deep yearning for social mobility and economic stability, driven by the belief, shared by many Sudanese men, that failure to provide for one's family brings shame. Family is highly valued, offering support and creating pathways for employment. In his imagined narrative, Jamal presents himself as a strong man from a family of policemen, now holding a prestigious job in Egypt, Sudan's former colonial 'master', with all the stability

and benefits needed to support his family. This imagined version of himself embodies the ideals of militarised masculinity, social mobility, and economic success.

However, the reality for many Nuba families is starkly different. Lacking the resources and networks that support Northern Riverain families, often due to historical oppression and discrimination rooted in Sudan's legacy of slavery, Nuba people struggle to achieve similar solidarity. As Taha, another Nuba engineer, explained: "Everyone in Nuba is struggling, so we cannot support each other like Northerners (Northern Riverain tribes), including facilitating job opportunities".⁵⁰ Given this context, it seems unlikely that a Nuba, often racialised as 'African' in Sudan's social and racial identity politics, would easily access such a prestigious job in Cairo.

Jamal's fantasy, therefore, reflects both his longing for better opportunities and a subtle resistance against the structural violence that excludes Nuba people from high-status jobs. His dream of being in a well-paid and respected security job is deeply connected to the ways in which labour is classified and valued in Sudan. The very labour conditions Jamal faces—marked by precarious employment and marginalisation—leave him vulnerable and fragile in his masculinity. This aligns with Rose's (2021) notion of 'fragile masculinity', where economic insecurity leads men to construct narratives of power or dominance. Similarly, Bourdieu's (2001) idea of *Masculine Domination* is evident in how Jamal exerts control over Akoi by fathering her child without marrying her, much like Bourgeois' (2003) 'vulnerable fathers' in East Harlem, who reinforce male power through symbolic and everyday violence as a way to cope with adversity. Jamal's idealised notion of labour—the powerful imagery of being employed in a security position—illustrates how deeply the image of 'good work' is tied to identity and dominance, even when the narrative is a fiction. Work, for him, becomes a means to escape his vulnerability and assert a form of male authority that he otherwise lacks.

⁵⁰ Interview, Taha, 26/6/2019.

5.4.3 'Bad/Dirty' Work: Inter-Group Tensions and Crisis of Masculinity

Just as the notion of good/dream work was shaped by historically ingrained values of economic stability, social mobility, and paternal masculinity, the opposite defined the concept of bad/dirty work. Although the term bad/dirty work is common in academic literature, Sudanese Arabic uses terms such as *aamal haamshiyya* (marginal work) or *shogl youmiya* (daily work) to describe precarious and less desirable work. One of the most symbolic examples of bad/dirty work in Sudan is the tea lady (see Section 5.3.2.1), but other examples include small traders, cooks, and farmers.

The categorisation of small traders as engaging in bad/dirty work is tied to their perceived lack of socio-economic power and the spatial dimension of their work. Their setting—on the streets, in outdoor spaces, often exposed to the harsh sun—contrasts sharply with the more prestigious 'big' traders, whose jobs are viewed as good/dream work (see Section 5.4.1). Small traders are often seen as lacking the strong social networks and resources that could elevate their status, reflecting limited access to better opportunities. This perception is further reinforced by assumptions that these traders struggle to support their families financially, contributing to a diminished sense of masculinity, as they are viewed as economically vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Another example of bad/dirty work is cooking—but only when done by men. In religiously conservative rural societies such as El-Rahad, cooking is strongly associated with femininity, and men who work as chefs are seen as challenging traditional gender norms, sometimes even being rumoured to be homosexual. This classification carries harsh consequences in Sudanese society, where homosexuality has been criminalised, with men facing severe social rejection and the threat of punishment (Barkawi and Savage 2020). For men, working as a cook is viewed as a challenge to paternal masculinity, deviating from expected gender roles and thus categorised as an undesirable occupation.

Farming is also considered bad/dirty work, particularly among the Baggara, who view it as lowly because it involves manual labour and using one's hands.⁵¹ This classification probably reflects the shared mindset of the Baggara community, characterised by a sense of

⁵¹Interview, Nasr, 16/2/2019.

uncertainty and perceived challenges to their traditional pastoral way of life, as farmers continue to expand their sphere of influence from the perspective of pastoralists. Since the early 1980s, the Baggara have faced challenges that have threatened their pastoral way of life. The 1984 drought and government mismanagement led to the loss of many animals, forcing the community towards a more sedentary lifestyle (Keen 1994). Additionally, sedentary farmers, who are seen as competitors, have expanded mechanised farming, further restricting the migration routes of the Baggara pastoralists.

As the Baggaras' livelihoods shift towards farming, their sense of identity is profoundly affected. Historically associated with Arab Islamic heritage and pastoralism (Hasan 1973), which one Baggara intellectual from El-Rahad described as "not a job but a way of life",⁵² the increasing reliance on farming—traditionally linked with 'African' populations in southern North Kordofan—creates internal conflict. Within Sudan's broader Arab social hierarchy, the Baggara are often referred to as 'Baggara Arab' rather than simply 'Arab', a label that reflects their livelihood as cow herders and implies mixed African heritage, possibly placing them in a less prominent position. This tension is reflected in their classification of farming as bad/dirty work, symbolising their effort to distance themselves from farming and protect their Arab Islamic identity and masculinity.

5.4.4 Feminisation of Bad/Dirty Work

While the previous examples of bad/dirty work included men's work, the most mentioned example in this category was tea lady. This section investigates the work settings and life circumstances that lead to a tea lady's work before examining a profession even 'worse' than that of tea lady, that of alcohol producers. Through their life histories, this section will investigate why their work is considered bad/dirty in Kordofan societies.

⁵² Interview, Bashir Elshariff, Omdurman Islamic University, 16/2/2019.

5.4.4.1 Sara: Tea Lady

Tea ladies occupy a complex position in everyday Sudanese life, embodying both familiar, maternal roles while being stigmatised for their work. They often cultivate close relationships with their customers, who frequent them regularly, especially men who regard them as maternal figures or sisters. However, despite their popularity, tea ladies are frequently associated with bad/dirty work, reinforcing gendered notions of what is and is not acceptable work for women. This was exemplified by the view expressed by Ustaz Hassan, who believed that working as a tea lady on the roadside was shameful: "A woman's task is to look after the house. She can work in offices if she wants to work. But working in the market is a shame. People will think that she has no family since the market is a highly public space".⁵³

Sara, a tea lady in her late thirties, exemplifies the vulnerability of women in this line of work. Living in the southeast neighbourhood of El-Rahad with her children and other relatives, Sara inherited no land or business. Her father, a Nuba Medaneen soldier in the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), had met her Zande mother during the war in South Sudan. Like many Sudanese women, Sara's ethnic identity was overshadowed by her paternal lineage. After her South Sudanese husband left for Juba to vote in the 2010-11 referendum⁵⁴ and never returned, Sara was left with no choice but to support her children by becoming a tea lady, a job she took reluctantly because her brothers could not offer financial help.

For Sara, tea-making was not a choice but a necessity. She explained her circumstances:

I have no other choice. Working seven days a week for five hours from six to eleven at night. I do not choose to work during these hours, but there is no shelter [shade] in my spot, and it is impossible to work during the day.

During the day, she focused on household responsibilities, caring for her six children, and managing the house. To ensure their spot in the market was not taken, her daughter worked as a tea-seller in the late afternoon once the worst of the heat was over, serving customers until Sara arrived in the evening. This arrangement allowed them to maintain

⁵³ Interview, Ustaz Hassan, 21/4/2019.

⁵⁴ In January, 2011, a referendum on South Sudanese independence was held. It is reported that there was 99% voter turnout, and many South Sudanese who were in Sudan returned to South Sudan to vote.

their regular spot while also managing household responsibilities. In the evening, after her daughter's shift, it was Sara who often braved the elements and the risks associated with working in public spaces after dark.

When Sara began working as a tea lady, she secured a government permit and paid the necessary fees, yet was still frequently harassed by the police, who would demand extra 'taxes' during their evening rounds. In addition, during Ramadan, they collected yet more fees known as *rasoum*, and Sara paid around 150 SDG annually. Despite fulfilling formal requirements of registration and work permit payment, tea ladies were subjected to more frequent 'taxation' than other formal businesses, reinforcing their association with informality. Sara described her work as "informal, self-employed, nobody to help me".⁵⁵ Dr Ibtisam, a Sudanese anthropologist who studied tea ladies, also referred to them as the most informal group of workers in Sudan.⁵⁶ The constant police harassment and lack of protection only deepened this informality, highlighting the institutional violence (Moser and McIlwaine 2000) and everyday violence that structured their labour relations.

Tea ladies also face the threat of sexual harassment from customers. Sara recounted how some men would inappropriately touch her without consent while she was preparing tea. In a country where physical contact between sexes, even handshakes, is often frowned upon, these acts were not only personally distressing but deeply humiliating. Her visible discomfort and anger as she spoke of these experiences reflected the emotional toll such disrespect had taken on her: "I hate and hate working in the market, but I have to work *like this* for the children".⁵⁷

In Sudan, it is considered a matter of great shame for men to allow their wives or daughters to work in public spaces, especially at night. For the Islamists, women going out to earn a living while many men remained unemployed was seen as a threat to gender norms (Mernissi 1991). This perception implied that the male figures in these women's lives lacked the financial means or moral authority to prevent them from taking up such work, casting doubt on the men's social standing and reinforcing patriarchal ideals. This type of work is

⁵⁵ Interview, Sara, 2/9/2019.

⁵⁶ Interview, Dr Ibtisam, University of Khartoum, 27/1/2019.

⁵⁷ Interview, Sara, 2/9/2019.

often seen as a last resort, typically only undertaken by families facing extreme socio-economic vulnerability.

Indeed, in Sudanese society, women's marital status and their relations carry significant weight, and the absence of protective male figures in the family can leave them vulnerable to harassment and mistreatment (Salih and Mohamed-Salih 1987). The importance placed on women's roles within the context of marriage and family dynamics heightens this vulnerability, and some men may criticise tea ladies because they feel their paternal masculinity is threatened, especially when they themselves face challenges in finding employment.

Though widely stigmatised, tea ladies' economic contribution is often undervalued. As discussed in Section 5.3.2.1, tea ladies frequently earn more than the average salary in El-Rahad due to the Sudanese tea/coffee-drinking culture. However, despite this overall economic success, they lack the social safety nets that would provide stability during times of illness or unrest. The feminisation of bad/dirty work in Sara's case illustrates how toxic masculinity, institutional and everyday violence, and socio-economic dynamics intersect to categorise her work as less valuable despite its financial viability.

Interestingly, despite the challenges she faces, Sara maintained a sense of dignity in her work, emphasising that she treats all her customers equally, regardless of their status. This attitude underscored her desire to counter the derogatory stereotypes often attached to tea ladies and to maintain her self-respect. She mentioned 'travelling women'—other female market workers—who bought tea from her, reflecting her hope that market work for women could be normalised. For Sara and her fellow tea ladies, acceptance and solidarity from other women is crucial in challenging the stigmatisation they faced.

5.4.4.2 Akoi and Yangite: Alcohol Producers

While tea ladies were openly recognised as holding undesirable jobs, alcohol production was even more stigmatised but less openly discussed due to religious taboos surrounding alcohol consumption in Sudan. After a short walk from Sara's house, I arrived at the home of several alcohol producers at the far end of the street. This area lacked water and electricity,

and approximately a year earlier, NISS had tried to forcibly relocate the South Sudanese residents to the north of the highway, an even more waterless area. The residents resisted, valuing proximity to water sources like El-Torda. Their emphasis on water reflects their refusal to depend on state-controlled resources.

The household included Akoi, Yangite, and several female relatives, ranging from teenagers to women in their thirties. They identified as Dinka Abyei and were Catholic. They were squatting in the houses, which were connected by a small door, and formed a broader 'household' that extended beyond one physical home. Within this shared space, the six women lived with their children and other relatives, including men, though these men were largely absent from the daily work of alcohol production.

All the alcohol producers were carrying two babies each, except for Kholood, who was only fourteen and had a one-year-old infant. Some of the children had burn scars from accidents involving fire. None of the women were formally married, including Akoi, who had a child with Jamal, the 'security contractor'. In Sudanese society, it is rare for unmarried women to have children, but in the absence of paternal figures, some men exploited these women's vulnerable circumstances.

The process of making *aragi* (a liquor distilled from dates) involved four days of labour. Akoi explained how much she spent on purchasing a *malwa* of dates,⁵⁸ the quantity of alcohol she could produce from it, and the price at which she could sell each bottle. However, a quick calculation suggested she was either losing money or barely making any profit. Interestingly, some customers would bring gifts or supply the dates themselves as a form of compensation or favour, rather than direct payment for her labour. This arrangement gave her little control or bargaining power, echoing Negussie's case in Ethiopia, where alcohol production served more as a way to pass time than for profit (Sender and Cramer 2022). The illegality of alcohol production further limited their negotiating power, especially in a society where alcohol is officially prohibited under the 1983 Liquor Prohibition Bill. While the Bill officially applied only to Muslims, it provided additional justification for the security

⁵⁸ A traditional measure using a tin can or container.

apparatus to further harass Christians, who were already subjected to harassment, torture, and killing due to their association with rebel movements, such as the SPLM.

Like tea ladies, alcohol producers were often harassed by the police under the pretence of collecting taxes. If they could not pay, they were arrested and had to pay fines for their release. Both Akoi and Yangite had been arrested multiple times, each paying 3,000 SDG for bail. This recurring abuse illustrates the deep institutional violence they endured, further exacerbated by their lower status as South Sudanese women.

Akoi and Yangite had learned their trade from their mothers and grandmothers, blending alcohol production with traditional domestic duties. As they juggled childcare and aragi production, the blurred boundaries between 'not-work' and employment were evident. Though their male relative, Tayeb, worked seasonally in agriculture and construction, his work—like theirs—was characterised as 'not-work', reflecting the social devaluation of labour that lacks formal payment or recognition.

When asked why they continued to work in alcohol production, their response was simple: “All for the family”.⁵⁹ It was their only means of survival, as they explained: “We cannot even work as tea ladies because we cannot be in public *like that*”. This highlighted the importance of invisibility and going unnoticed for South Sudanese working in Sudan. Their response reminded me of an incident I had witnessed on the way to Akoi and Yangite's house, where a South Sudanese family was criticised for having their toilet placed outside, like their non-South Sudanese neighbours. They were shamed for the 'stinky' toilet and forced to move it indoors. Another distressing story was the almost weekly disappearance of South Sudanese people in El-Obeid, whose bodies were later found in the forest.⁶⁰ But, unless I specifically asked South Sudanese individuals, I would have never heard of most such incidents, even when they involved killings—highlighting the invisibility of their existence, and even their deaths, in Sudan. These grim reminders reflect the hostile environment, discrimination, and physical dangers South Sudanese face while trying to survive and work in Sudan.

⁵⁹ Interview, Akoi and Yangite, 2/9/2019.

⁶⁰ Interview, Sultan Bok, 24/2/2019.

These narratives, alongside the life histories of Sara, Akoi, and Yangite, reveal the stark reality of how bad/dirty work is constructed in Kordofan. Alcohol production and tea-making are extensions of women's reproductive labour, learned from previous generations. These jobs, although vital for survival, carry intense stigma and reinforce societal hierarchies based on gender, ethnicity, and religion. These women, positioned at the bottom of Kordofan society, navigate a complex intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and economic exploitation.

The exploration of good/dream and bad/dirty work in Kordofan highlights that labour classifications reinforce the broader power structures sustaining Sudan's labour regimes. For women, these classifications function as mechanisms of control and oppression, while paternal masculinity, shaped by historical and social contexts, remains central to defining 'good' or 'bad' work. The marginalisation of women in these roles underscores the enduring influence of gendered, racial, and ethnic hierarchies, as well as the categorical violence that accompanies them, in Sudanese society.

5.5 Conclusion: 'Work' as Reflections of Power

This chapter has explored the meaning of everyday work in rural Kordofan through the lens of categorical violence, extending Tilly's (1999) framework of classification to include structural, symbolic, and everyday violence. These forms of violence were found to be sustained and regenerated in labour regimes, influencing how different types of work are valued and classified. By employing the Time-Use Survey (TUS) methodology, inspired by the Space, Time, and Violence (STV) framework of Elias and Rai (2019), this analysis uncovered how unpaid social reproductive labour remains invisible and unrecognised, despite its centrality to rural production and the sustenance of life.

This invisibility of women's work is a continuation of the historical erasure of their contributions from Sudanese labour history, as examined in Chapter 4. Symbolic violence plays a key role in this process, with Islamic ideology associating women with household duties and caring responsibilities. This association has become so normalised that not only society but women themselves often devalue their own work. The concept of 'not-work' arises from this symbolic violence and persists in everyday life, reflecting how women's

labour, despite its significance to rural capitalist production, is routinely excluded from being considered 'real work'.

The STV framework also illuminated the spatial dimensions of work and how space is closely linked to power. The physical location in which labour takes place directly influences whether that work is valued. For instance, work that occurs outdoors, in markets, or on the streets—especially when done by women—is perceived as degrading. The spatial context, therefore, adds a layer of understanding as to why certain types of work are devalued or dismissed, offering insights into the historical and social dynamics that shape the recognition and classification of labour.

Beyond the focus on reproductive labour, both paid and unpaid, this analysis also highlighted groups of workers whose labour often remains unaccounted for in official classifications that focus primarily on remuneration. By using the TUS, the study brought to light various forms of everyday work essential for maintaining life in rural Kordofan, particularly forms of labour tied to social reproduction, informal work, pastoral work, and traditional work. This challenges remuneration-based classifications by revealing the fundamental nature of this 'invisible' work in sustaining life and social relations in rural settings.

Central to the discussion was the role of the family in shaping the classification and valuation of work. Family emerged as the driving force behind people's work, influencing not only how work is valued but also how gender expectations around labour are framed. The need to protect and expand the family became a central theme, with societal ideals around paternal masculinity and motherhood closely tied to work roles, and shame associated with failing to meet these expectations. Through life histories, the analysis explored how gender segregation and sex-typing of labour markets reflect these pressures, and how they underpin the categorisation of 'good' and 'bad' work.

Family, however, is not only a source of support and inspiration; it also functions as an enforcer of the violent division of labour. The romanticisation of family in Sudanese society obscures the fact that the family is also a site of exploitation, particularly for women whose reproductive labour is undervalued and often unpaid. While family offers protection, it also rationalises exploitative labour practices for socially oppressed groups. The expectation that

women perform labour out of 'love' and 'care' strips their work of economic value and perpetuates gender inequalities. Pigou (1920) encapsulates this in his observation that hiring a housekeeper would increase national income, whereas marrying her would decrease it—highlighting how reproductive labour is devalued when performed within the family.

The discussion of good/dream work and bad/dirty work further emphasised the role of race and ethnicity in reinforcing labour hierarchies. Workers from historically marginalised groups, particularly dark-skinned Nuba and South Sudanese individuals, are disproportionately engaged in the most stigmatised forms of labour. Their aspirations for better work are a cry for dignity within a system of categorical violence that pairs them, along with women, with 'inferior' work. This continuum of violence reflects how race, ethnicity, gender, and class intersect to marginalise certain groups, particularly in the context of Sudan's complex social and labour histories.

In conclusion, the chapter underscores how the classification of work in rural Kordofan not only reflects but actively reinforces broader power structures within Sudan's labour regimes. The valuation of work is deeply embedded in social constructs of family, gender, race, and space, shaping labour practices in ways that perpetuate inequalities and violence, especially for women and marginalised ethnic groups. These structures of power continue to influence which types of work are seen as valuable, who performs them, and how they are classified, reinforcing systemic marginalisation and exploitation across generations.

Chapter 6 Access to Work through Family, State, and Citizenship in Rural Labour Control Regimes

6.1 Introduction

Traditional economic theories often frame labour markets as self-regulating entities governed primarily by supply-and-demand forces. Macroeconomic approaches, such as Say's Law (1834), posit that a surplus of trained workers will create its own demand, naturally leading to employment opportunities. At the microeconomic level, human capital theory (Becker 1964; Mincer 1974) similarly suggests that individual investments in education and skills yield predictable returns in the labour market. These perspectives, supported by rational choice theory (Becker 1968; Buchanan and Tullock 1969), imply that people are free to pursue the most profitable jobs, with labour market outcomes shaped by the decisions of rational, atomised individuals. This assumption of a straightforward relationship between human capital investment and employment, however, does not reflect the realities of conflict-affected and socially stratified settings, such as Sudan, where labour market access is mediated by historical, social, and power-based structures (O'Brien 1983; Sikainga 1996).

Critical perspectives, notably political economy and labour regime approaches, offer an alternative understanding by viewing labour markets as complex entities shaped by socio-political factors rather than isolated economic mechanisms. Fine (1998) and Prasch (2003) argue that labour markets cannot be viewed as homogenous systems but must be understood in terms of their plural, socially constructed nature. In this view, labour markets are embedded in social relations and historical contexts (Baglioni, Campling, Coe, et al. 2022; Lerche 2022) and power dynamics (Foucault 1973), which influence how individuals access work and navigate job opportunities (Peluso and Ribot 2003, 2020). In Sudan, particularly in rural regions like Kordofan, access to labour markets is not merely a function of skills or qualifications but is deeply intertwined with family networks (Thorsen 2013), ethnic affiliations, and other socio-political factors that structure who gains employment and under what conditions.

Drawing from Wells' (1996) ethnographic approach to California's rural agricultural labour markets, this chapter explores who accesses specific job opportunities in Sudan and through which mechanisms, focusing on three structural elements that influence access: personalised recruitment mechanisms, local organisational systems, and citizenship stratification. First, it examines personalised recruitment mechanisms, showing how gender, family status, and generational differences shape employment opportunities. Second, it addresses the role of societal structures—particularly clientelism, patriarchy, political affiliations, ethnic memberships, and the use of *wasta*—in mediating labour demand narratives and hiring dynamics within Sudan's labour regimes. Finally, the chapter considers how citizenship stratification, informed by Sudan's complex ethnic and historical backgrounds, affects access for marginalised workers, showing how social hierarchies shape rural wage labour markets. In doing so, this chapter advances an understanding of control and exploitation as products of categorical violence arising from gender, race, ethnic, and class relations within local labour control regimes (Jonas 2009; Pattenden 2016) in rural, developing-country contexts.

By examining these structuring elements, the chapter illustrates that labour market access in Sudan is far from a simple economic transaction; rather, it is deeply embedded in social and historical contexts that define who gains employment and under what conditions. Family connections play an essential role in shaping people's labour trajectories, revealing that the household remains a primary site of both economic sustenance and capitalist production. This centrality of the home to one's working life demonstrates that labour access is as much about social relationships as it is about individual qualifications. Furthermore, just as Chapter 5 highlighted how historical classifications of gender, race, and ethnicity perpetuate inequality, this chapter uncovers a continuum of violence (Bourgeois 2004; Cockburn 2009) within local labour control regimes. These regimes reinforce social hierarchies, systematically restricting employment access for certain groups and thereby sustaining entrenched inequalities.

Through this lens, Sudan's rural labour markets emerge not only as economic entities but as contested spaces of social power, where categorical violence and exclusion persist across generations. Thus, as shown in this chapter, the control and exploitation present in Sudan's labour markets reflect the enduring impact of socio-political forces, challenging the notion

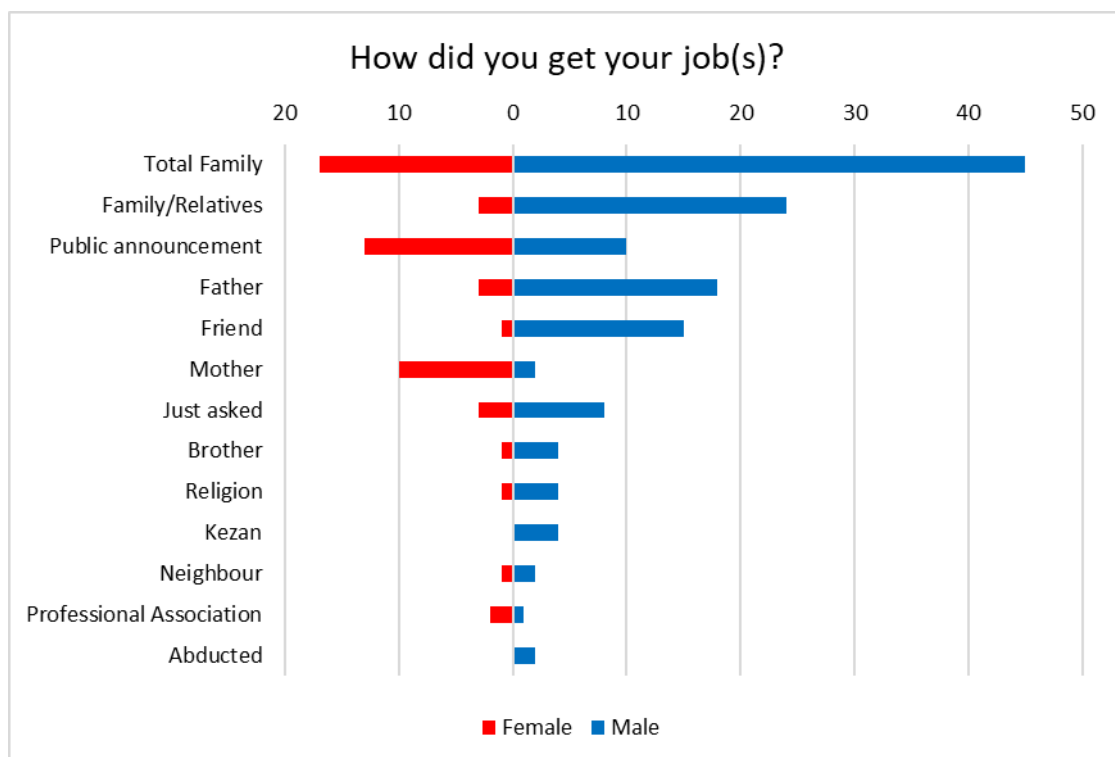
that employment is purely an economic matter and instead framing it as a product of long-standing social structures and power relations.

6.2 Personalised Job-Searching Mechanism: Intra-Family

Intermediation

This section examines personalised recruitment mechanisms in rural North Kordofan, adapting Wells' (1996) insights on rural Californian labour markets, where job access relies on personal networks such as family and friends rather than formal employment offices. Although my study goes beyond agriculture, a similar dependence on family ties is observed in Sudan's labour markets. Unlike Wells, who did not emphasise gender distinctions in these mechanisms, my analysis shows clear gender-based differences. To investigate this, participants were asked about the key individuals or methods involved in securing employment. Figure 18 summarises responses to the question, "how did you get your job(s)?"

Figure 17. How did you get your job(s)?



The findings reveal that both men and women utilise family members as *wasta* to secure work; however, men predominantly rely on fathers, uncles, and brothers, while women turn mainly to their mothers—a gender-based contact pattern similar to Mann’s (2011) finding in Khartoum labour markets. Although family is a primary channel for women, they also engage with public announcements more frequently than men, who rank these lower in preference. Male job-seekers additionally utilise connections through friends and religious networks, with men uniquely citing Kezan and forced recruitment (SPLM/A enlistment). Non-*wasta*-based methods, such as public announcements and “just asked”, were more common among job-seekers from marginalised groups, such as the Nuba and Southern Sudanese. Yet even these methods often involve demonstrating a degree of *wasta* to assure potential employers of reliability and trustworthiness.

This section explores the mediating role of family networks in accessing work, particularly how intra-family intermediation is differentiated by gender. It also addresses how these dynamics challenge the notion of automatic household cooperation (Sen 1987), revealing the complexity of negotiations within families around employment support.

6.2.1 Male Domination and Patriarchy in Intra-Family Intermediation

In North Kordofan, there is a tendency to prioritise men over women in family-supported job searches. An analysis of survey results and labour-life histories reveals that male family members—especially fathers and uncles—often play an active role in securing employment for younger male relatives, such as sons and nephews. Male alliances within families emerge as key networks for obtaining work, reflecting broader social expectations that men will fulfil the role of provider. Fathers’ support for daughters’ job searches, in contrast, tends to be more limited, although exceptions occur among families with elevated social status or in more urbanised rural locations, such as El-Rahad Town. This disparity reflects the gender roles ingrained in societal norms and Islamic teachings, as discussed in Chapter 5, where men are expected to work in support of the family, while women are often confined to household responsibilities, a form of symbolic violence. Chapter 5 also explored how shame is socially attached to men’s inability to meet provider roles. Consequently, older male family members often go to great lengths to secure stable employment for younger men, as

this is a family priority closely tied to expectations of marriage and family expansion—the foremost life objective in the psyche of rural Kordofan families. The following sections explore how these family dynamics shape job access for men, illustrating how recruitment mechanisms are guided by broader familial goals.

The labour-life history of Ayman, a Gawamaa accountant, illustrates how fathers and uncles facilitate job access for younger male family members, aligning with the family objective of expanding the paternal lineage. This mediation reflects a broader motivation in rural Kordofan, where employment is pursued to uphold family ties and patriarchal development, often at the expense of women’s roles within the family.

After graduating from university, Ayman sought employment in Sudan’s banking sector,⁶¹ one of the first sectors to undergo Islamisation through *tamkeen* (Section 4.6.1). Entry into this field required job seekers to visibly support the NCP and identify as Islamists (Jamal 1991). Ayman adapted to this expectation, adopting the appearance and persona of an Islamist: he wore *tamakana*, simple yet well-ironed two-piece suits similar to those of Kezan ministers, and displayed a prominent prayer mark on his forehead. However, women in the community, who often find themselves constrained by Islamist norms, see this mark as easily fabricated; several female participants shared with humour that some men simply apply their wives’ brown eyeshadow to their foreheads to appear more devout. This subtle critique from women reflects a quiet form of resistance, challenging the authenticity of these displays of piety. Appearance and attire held significant symbolic value within the Islamist movement, with Jamal (1991:16) noting that individuals in urban settings made “almost comic attempts” to embody the physical, religious, and political identity of Islamists.

After working in the Sudanese banking sector for seven years, Ayman’s uncle helped him to get a job with a Gulf company operating in an African country.⁶² While Ayman found the job fulfilling, he decided to leave due to his perception of local women in the majority Christian African country as acting ‘too *loose* and un-Islamic’.⁶³ Subsequently, with the support of his uncle once again, Ayman obtained a visa and employment in Saudi Arabia, where his uncle

⁶¹ Interview, Ayman, 16/7/2019.

⁶² The country is not named to protect anonymity.

⁶³ Interview, Ayman, 16/7/2019.

and his family lived. Historically, Saudi Arabia has been the top destination for Sudanese labour migrants, with many Islamist Sudanese families relocating there with extended family since the 1970s (Galaleldin 1988). Having saved a significant portion of his salary from his African job, eventually, he married one of his cousins in Saudi Arabia. However, strains emerged in their marriage as Ayman and his wife had only two daughters. Furthermore, the demanding work hours added to Ayman's stress, and he decided to return to Sudan, leaving his wife, daughters and job in Saudi Arabia.

Upon returning, Ayman remained unemployed in Khartoum for five months yet enjoyed what he described as a “comfortable” life while occasionally teaching Islam—a common pursuit for Sudanese Islamists who return from Saudi Arabia and sometimes undergo further radicalisation. Eventually, his father intervened, arranging a job for him in El-Rahad through a direct approach to a company owner. Ayman subsequently remarried, choosing a younger woman from his tribe, and without hesitation, openly expressed his hope that this new chapter would bring him a son.

With support from the Islamist network and his uncle and father’s intermediation, Ayman secured several prestigious employment opportunities, illustrating the power of family-based connections in accessing work. Despite being a university graduate, he opted for a period of unemployment simply because he could afford it—a divergence from human capital and rational choice assumptions about 'choice' and labour market realities. These jobs not only provided financial stability but also allowed him to save for major life events, particularly marriage. In Sudan, where economic challenges make it difficult for men to save for marriage, Ayman’s ability to marry twice—even in El-Rahad—is notable. Marriage is crucial for both family and tribal continuity in Sudan. It is seen as “the only way for a young man to be the head of an autonomous household” (Salih and Mohamed-Salih 1987:41), enabling men to elevate their social standing and gain community acceptance (Essien and Falola 2008:122). However, due to its high cost, obtaining a well-paid, reputable job is a prerequisite for young men aiming to establish stable families. The costs associated with marriage in Sudan are considerable, including the dowry—gold jewellery, traditional clothing, and perfumes for the bride—as well as the costs of hosting wedding celebrations, providing food for guests, and setting up a household.

In this context, uncles' involvement in nephews' employment aligns with the family goal of expanding the family while adhering to Islamically sanctioned practices and preserving resources for marriage. Marriage between first cousins is permissible in Islam and widely practised among Islamised and Arabised families in Sudan (Ismail and Makki 1990:15).⁶⁴ In North Kordofan, where most people are Muslim, sons are often expected to marry daughters of their paternal uncles (Cunnison 1966; Salih and Mohamed-Salih 1987) or “patrilateral parallel cousins” (Ismail and Makki 1990:15). Thus, some uncles support their nephews’ employment to potentially secure a marriage match for one of their daughters. Ayman’s uncle’s active role in his life also highlights the fluid, transnational concept of household: while the official classification of household assumes physical cohabitation (UN 2017), Ayman’s uncle’s involvement, even from Saudi Arabia, underscores how family ties transcend physical boundaries, influencing employment and marriage decisions.

In-family marriages also retain hard-earned dowries and gifts within the family, offering flexibility in dowry payments in the face of economic challenges.⁶⁵ At the tribal level, marriage within the tribe “remains the rule” (Ismail and Makki 1990:9), preserving social status tied to ethnic, racial, and religious affiliations. Families with a more Arab and ‘white’ background, for example, prefer marriage within their group or with equally ‘Arabised’ and ‘Islamised’ families, a trend also noted by Mahmoud (1984) among Jaalyyin bourgeoisies in El-Rahad.

While marriage and family expansion are top priorities for Sudanese families in Kordofan, underlying these patriarchal, in-family networks that support young men’s employment access are patterns that normalise invisible violence against women. This norm reduces daughters’ chances of accessing better jobs, limits their autonomy, and often keeps women’s voices suppressed, with daughters rarely having equal decision-making power in arranged marriages (Ismail and Makki 1990).

In Ayman’s case, his father’s role in securing employment in El-Rahad provided justification for leaving his family in Saudi Arabia, citing his wife’s inability to bear a son. Islamic norms establish patriarchy in Sudan, with sons seen as “guaranteeing the family’s continuity”

⁶⁴ Marriages between first cousins are allowed in the fourth chapter of the Quran, *Surah An-Nisa*, (4:22-24). Ahmed (2021) argues that a half of marriages among Muslims are between first cousins.

⁶⁵ Interview, Aziz, 1/7/2019.

(Ismail and Makki 1990:17), and daughters often valued less. Among the Baggara Messiria tribe in Kordofan, for instance, al-Hakkamat women celebrate the birth of a son with poems and dances, but not that of a daughter.⁶⁶ This unequal valuation of genders is widely accepted, even by al-Hakkamat themselves, normalising situations where a husband may abandon a wife if she has 'only' daughters, despite the biological fact that it is the male sperm that determines the child's sex. Similarly, if a wife cannot conceive, the blame often falls solely on her, even if infertility lies with the husband or both, justifying the husband's pursuit of additional wives in search of a male heir.⁶⁷ This symbolic devaluation of women becomes internalised, leading to real-life consequences, with families prioritising the birth of sons or even taking a second wife to produce male heirs.

Islamically, a man seeking a second or third wife must obtain his first wife's consent and ensure her socio-economic security. In practice, however, some Sudanese men bypass these requirements, entering additional marriages without consultation. Interestingly—or ironically—husbands who admitted to disregarding these Islamic guidelines often belonged to prominent families with strong NCP connections, though this was mainly observed in Khartoum.⁶⁸ In the name of family expansion and prosperity amid the social and political continuity of Islamisation, access to jobs is intermediated to maintain and regenerate masculine, patriarchal dominance within families (Bourdieu 2001), often normalising the disregard for the needs, rights, and autonomy of women and girls.

6.2.2 Women's Job Access, Marriage and Shaming the Family

6.2.2.1 *Class Dynamics and Family Support for Daughters' Job Access*

In rural Kordofan, daughters receive considerably less support than sons from their families when seeking employment. Although the 'total family' method (Figure 18) is the most common approach for women, work histories show that the quality and frequency of this

⁶⁶ Interview, Gisma, 11/9/2019.

⁶⁷ Observation and interview, Imam, 28/1/2019.

⁶⁸ Interview, Faheem, 5/10/2019, Omar, 29/1/2019.

support are often inconsistent. This imbalance leads educated middle-class daughters to rely more heavily on less social tools, such as public announcements, to find work.

The methods and forms of *wasta* available to women differ significantly from those for men. For women, the primary methods are 'mother' and 'public announcements', categorically different from men's use of male family contacts. This disparity reflects entrenched gender norms within family structures, where income generation is prioritised for men in order to sustain the patrilineage and expand patriarchal family influence. Meanwhile, daughters are often expected to focus on their roles as future wives and mothers, seeking employment only if family finances necessitate it. However, these dynamics are not uniform and vary according to factors such as family ethnicity and class.

In lower- and lower-middle-class families, mothers frequently play a primary role in helping daughters secure employment, particularly when they are the main providers, as in the cases of Sara and Akoi (Section 5.4.4). In such families, where a paternal figure may be absent, mothers face financial pressure to provide, leading both mothers and daughters to engage in income generation. From a young age, daughters often form closer inter-generational bonds and socialisation with their mothers than boys do with their fathers, who are more likely to build horizontal peer-based bonds with classmates and friends (Ismail and Makki 1990:17). Even when they do not work side by side, these mothers frequently assist daughters in finding job opportunities.

Support for daughters' employment varies significantly across socio-economic backgrounds, and not all daughters lack backing from older male family members. In some communities, like the Hausa—part of the Fallata ethnic group of West African immigrants as categorised by the colonial administration (see Section 4.4.1)—daughters are expected to contribute financially from a young age, sometimes as early as five or ten years old.⁶⁹ Initially recruited for colonial irrigation projects, the Fallata have established communities where, among the Hausa, paid work is often seen as a means of practising Islam and sustaining the family, rather than restricting women solely to the domestic sphere. Zahra, for instance, a Hausa domestic servant, secured her position through her father's connections during a Tijaniya

⁶⁹ Interview, Zahra, Nadia, 5/9/2019.

wedding.⁷⁰ Even within Muslim communities, diverse perspectives on women's work emerge (Mernissi 1991), justifying the different types of labour that women undertake for family survival amid the powerful currents of Islamist politics.

The degree of paternal involvement in helping daughters access jobs can also vary within the Hausa community, depending on factors such as generation and socio-economic shifts. In cases where the mother is ill or has passed away, the eldest daughters often assume a 'second mother' role, distinct from the support they provide when mothers are present. In this context, daughters take on full responsibility for domestic tasks, which can lead them to sacrifice education and begin working at a young age, whether in unpaid family roles or paid employment.⁷¹ The efforts made by eldest daughters may ultimately improve the family's socio-economic standing, enabling younger daughters to attend school and pursue different career paths than their older sisters. Such disparities in job access, mediated by older male relatives, can lead to varying levels of support and opportunities for older and younger daughters, shaping their individual lives and affecting sibling relationships. Middle- to lower-class families often lack the luxury of keeping daughters at home until marriage: they face the dilemma between needing all household members, including daughters, to work and contribute to strained family finances, and the desire to protect them and uphold their reputations, especially before marriage.

6.2.2.2 Daughters' Job-Hunting Denied for Marriage and Family Honour

In contrast to lower-middle-class families of Hausa, Nuba, South Sudanese, and other social backgrounds who rely on daughters' employment for family finances, upper-middle-class and wealthier families have the choice of keeping their daughters at home until marriage or permitting them to work outside. This distinction is especially noticeable among the educated rural elites. Fathers in these families who hold influential local positions and are more liberal in their beliefs may support their educated daughters in finding job opportunities. Recognising that their networks can help secure 'suitable' office jobs (Section

⁷⁰ Interview, Zahra, Nadia, 5/9/2019.

⁷¹ Observation and interview, Samiah, 30/8/2019.

5.4.1), these fathers see experience in 'Islamically approved' professions as a protective measure.

However, resourceful, supportive attitudes toward daughters' education and careers are not always common in rural North Kordofan. Even when daughters have university degrees, fathers may withhold job-search support, especially if they themselves have not pursued higher education.⁷² Leena, a young female graduate, embodies the frustrations of many educated women. She voiced disappointment over her family's lack of support for her career ambitions, describing unfair recruitment practices that favour personal connections over merit:

I feel like I only have the option of getting married after university. Some people think that girls go to university to find husbands. But for me, I just wanted to study and I had to prove to my parents that I could overcome any academic challenges.... My brothers did not have to do anything. If I don't want to get married, I need to find work on my own. My family will not help me find a job and they may not allow it. Plus, so many people nowadays rely on their personal connections to find work even though they have no qualifications. Especially boys—they don't care! I want to find work in the right way.

Leena's story highlights family dynamics around daughters' aspirations for education and work. While her brothers received swift family support for education and employment, Leena faced resistance.⁷³ Now that she has graduated, her family expects her to prioritise marriage, viewing her university degree primarily as a means to secure a husband rather than pursue a career.⁷⁴ This emphasis on marriage as the ultimate goal for educated women reinforces the challenges faced by Leena and many others in similar situations.

Family expectations of marriage also lead some fathers to not support daughters' job-hunting to protect family honour. They fear that daughters working outside the home could face unwanted advances from male colleagues or physical threats, which they believe could bring 'shame' upon the daughter and the family as a whole (Ismail and Makki 1990:20).

In my discussions with Shanabla families on the outskirts of El-Rahad and within the El-Rahad community, I gained insight into why unmarried Shanabla daughters are often

⁷² Observation, Hashim, 9/7/2019.

⁷³ Interview, Leena, 23/1/2019.

⁷⁴ Interview, Ustaz Hatim, 11/9/2019.

discouraged from pursuing education beyond early primary school (ages 6-7) and from seeking outside employment. Families worry that daughters' physical beauty, associated with their 'white' skin and perceived 'pure Arab' heritage, would make them stand out among the more racially mixed, darker-skinned population of El-Rahad.⁷⁵ Families fear this distinctiveness could attract unwanted male attention, and to prevent potential 'shame', restrict their daughters' mobility and job opportunities. Thus, families' lack of intermediation for daughters' employment reflects these protective concerns.

For some daughters, particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, the risk of violence in the workplace extends beyond reputational harm. Workplace violence against women, including fatalities due to lack of safety standards (Radio Dabanga 2019) and cases of rape (Radio Dabanga 2022), remains prevalent in conflict-affected areas such as South Kordofan, south of El-Rahad. Families from vulnerable, lower-class backgrounds, including Nuba and South Sudanese, often would like to keep their daughters at home for safety but lack the financial means to do so.

6.2.2.3 Public Announcements: Lack of Family Support and Integrity

With limited family support, some educated women turn to public announcements as their primary means of finding employment. Unlike men, who benefit from various family-based intermediations, women's options are generally more restricted. Exceptions arise when mothers are active in specific economic roles within the family, as previously discussed. This reliance on public announcements may be partly due to the fact that jobs deemed appropriate within an Islamic context, such as teaching or nursing roles in public institutions, are often advertised publicly. However, public announcements are not limited to these fields alone (Figure 18). Men tend to combine public announcements with family connections to maximise their employment opportunities, whereas women who rely primarily on public postings may have fewer opportunities to leverage *wasta* for the same purpose.

⁷⁵ Interview, Halima, 3/9/2019.

In El-Rahad, some female jobseekers applying for publicly advertised roles claim that they consciously choose not to rely on *wasta*, despite the challenges this may entail. Older educated women report having secured publicly advertised jobs without using family connections, whereas younger women seem to rely on them more frequently today.⁷⁶ While it is unclear if these younger women truly avoid using personal connections or if circumstances force them to, their statements reflect a broader disapproval of the current system, where men often resort to any means necessary, including bribes or family connections, to secure employment. When it comes to state jobs, this choice signifies a belief that such positions, especially in public institutions, should be awarded on the basis of qualifications and merit. These women are acutely aware that their male counterparts, bolstered by stronger social networks, tend to prioritise *wasta* and other informal methods to secure employment. This unequal access to support networks remains a point of frustration for many educated women, who often excel academically, including at some of the country's top universities, yet face limited access to the same level of assistance in their job searches.⁷⁷

6.3 State Control over Public Job Access

Section 6.2.2 highlighted that educated women often rely on public announcements to find employment. A key source of these is the Labour Office, a governmental entity under the oversight of both the federal and state Ministries of Labour, with financial management by the state Ministry of Finance. The Labour Office advertises vacancies for both public and private employers, shortlists candidates, and mediates labour-related disputes. This section examines how the Labour Office structures job access, highlighting the role of the state—the largest employer in Sudan—in shaping labour opportunities.

Wells' (1996) concept of structures of local activity systems, rooted in Burawoy's (1985) study on state intervention in capital-labour relations, offers a useful lens through which to examine how state control influences labour relations and demand dynamics. This approach

⁷⁶ Interviews, Hawa, 12/9/2019; Fadwa, 13/9/2019; Rabha, 20/3/2019.

⁷⁷ Interview, Ustaz Hatim, 11/9/2019; Ustaz Osama, 21/4/2019; Professor Assal, University of Khartoum, 9/3/2019.

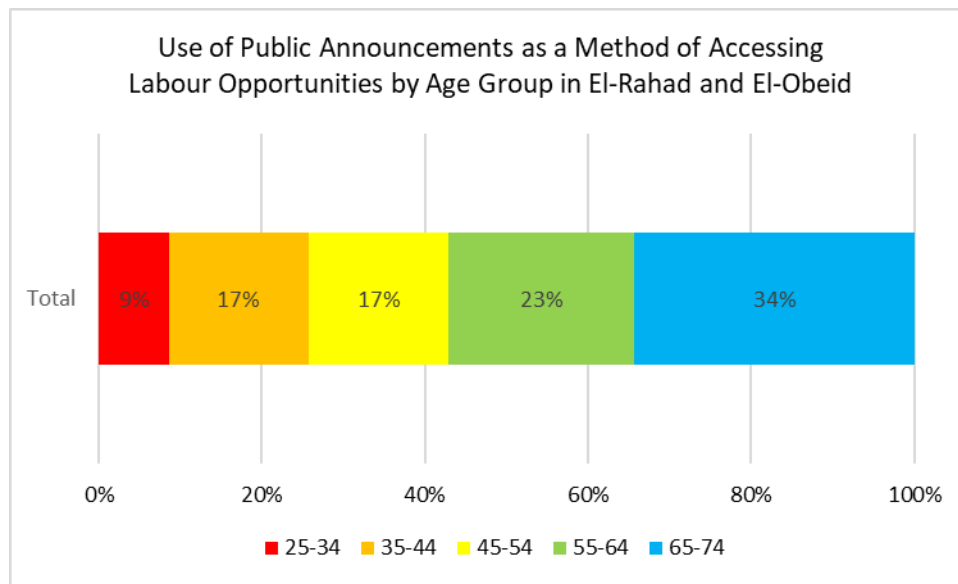
assumes that job access is shaped by socio-political factors tied to the state's role as both a social institution and employer. Thus, access to work is socially and historically mediated, rather than determined solely by the forces of supply and demand (Lewis 1954) or individual human capital (Mincer 1974). This section explores how socio-political dynamics surrounding the state shape labour demand and recruitment patterns and influence the social profiles of successful and unsuccessful candidates.

6.3.1 Historically Reduced Use of Public Announcements

The practice of using public announcements for job vacancies in Sudan dates back to the British colonial period, particularly during the implementation of the 'Sudanisation' policy, which aimed to replace British and Egyptian civil servants with qualified Sudanese (Holt and Daly 2014). The use of public announcements continued into the post-colonial period, coming to symbolise meritocracy in public service recruitment. Over time, they became widely perceived as a fair and equitable means of job access, leading more female jobseekers to rely on them as their primary job-hunting method (Section 6.2.2.3). However, their use has evolved in response to state and societal transformations.

Mann's (2014:563) research on job access in urban labour markets in Khartoum shows that older respondents were more likely to rely on public announcements for job information, while younger respondents turned increasingly to personal contacts. To examine if this pattern holds in Kordofan, Figure 19 presents the generational breakdown of participants who accessed jobs through public announcements. Although the data compilation differs from Mann's study, it confirms a similar trend: older respondents accessed job opportunities more frequently through public announcements, whereas younger respondents relied more on personal networks.

Figure 18. Use of Public Announcements as a Method of Accessing Labour Opportunities by Age Group in El-Rahad and El-Obeid



The labour histories of families who have traditionally relied on public announcements for government jobs reveal a decline in such announcements since the rise of the El-Bashir government. According to the Hawa family, job opportunities in public institutions were once openly and frequently advertised; since the Islamist military takeover, however, they reported a noticeable decline in public vacancy advertisements. Despite this reduction, they observed that new colleagues continue to join workplaces, often without any public announcement or interview.⁷⁸ Hawa, a public servant, criticised this shift, stating, “Today, it doesn’t matter if you have the right qualifications. You just have to be Kezan”, referring to jobseekers with connections or influence within the ruling elite.⁷⁹

For many seeking government employment, membership in the NCP—a marker of being Kezan—has become particularly influential, especially in North Kordofan, where the local population has a complex relationship with the NCP. However, NCP membership alone does not guarantee employment; Kezan connections may prioritise applicants they see as useful for their interests, regardless of qualifications. Conversely, those deemed unbeneficial to

⁷⁸ Interviews, Hawa, 12/9/2019; Fadwa, Mahmood, 13/9/2019.

⁷⁹ Interview, Hawa, 12/9/2019.

the regime's objectives may be denied employment, even if they meet educational or professional qualifications.

Faced with these restrictions, younger participants have adopted diverse strategies, including seeking *wasta* intermediation through fathers or family friends with influence, in addition to submitting standard applications for vacancies. Several government employees also confirmed the widespread practice of paying a special 'application fee', or *rashwa*, during the selection process. In El-Obeid, for instance, by 2019, this fee had reached approximately 5,000 SDG, potentially allowing candidates to strengthen their candidacy discreetly.⁸⁰

6.3.2 Just a Little *Wasta* Push: Powerful People's Access to State Jobs

This section presents two case studies demonstrating how jobseekers with influential *wasta* and advantageous social backgrounds can secure state jobs without following formal application and interview processes. The first example features an elite male from a Northern Riverain ethnic background, and the second highlights a grandson of a tribal leader from Kordofan. However, it is important to note that these social factors do not guarantee universal success in job access; each case depends on a unique blend of social factors and power dynamics.

The dominance of Northern Riverain tribes in government positions during the Sudanisation process (Section 4.4.3) has left a lasting impact on Sudan's social hierarchy, including in Kordofan. Men from these tribes continue to occupy higher social positions, with access to networks, connections, and resources that play an essential role in securing state job opportunities.

Munir: Shaigi Elite

One example is Munir, a Shaigi (Shaigiyya) businessman from El-Obeid, who worked in state institutions before launching successful businesses. Munir's *jallaba* father, originally a

⁸⁰ Interview, Motwakil, 8/9/2019.

builder in the Northern State, accumulated power and wealth in El-Obeid, enabling Munir to attend the region's most prestigious boys' secondary school. It was there that Munir befriended Ahmed Haroun, a classmate who later became one of the most influential Kezan during the El-Bashir regime (Section 3.1.2.2). Munir recalls that Haroun, from a Muslim Brotherhood family, organised after-school activities that evolved into an Islamic study group—effectively the Muslim Brotherhood's youth wing. Many of Haroun's classmates, including Munir, were later recruited into the Popular Defence Force (PDF), a paramilitary arm of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), where they participated in military campaigns.⁸¹

After completing secondary school, Munir pursued higher education at two prestigious universities in Khartoum, aiming to “obtain at least one degree”, amid the political upheaval of Nimeiri's 1985 revolution. Upon graduation, family connections secured him a position at the Zakat Chamber, a government agency responsible for collecting and distributing religious payments. Reflecting on this role, Munir remarked, “This is where the free money is, and you absolutely have to know someone powerful to get in there”.⁸²

With savings from his work at the Zakat Chamber, Munir performed the *umrah* pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, where his family had relocated. Once there, family assistance helped him find employment, which allowed him to marry. However, due to tightening migration policies, Munir eventually returned to Sudan, where he sought assistance from Haroun—then governor of North Kordofan—and obtained a position as Executive of the Chamber of Research on Renaissance and Development in El-Obeid, a governmental organisation that Haroun promoted and used to secure additional state funding (Section 5.2.4). Munir recalls that the Chamber was filled with NCP members and plagued by corruption and unqualified staff, which led him to leave and start his own business.

During the interview, Munir, cautious because of the ongoing Sudanese Revolution, downplayed his association with the Kezan, though it was clear that his connections within the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist networks had significantly shaped his career. While human capital theory frames education in terms of economic matter as a quantifiable investment, Munir's schooling offered more than academic credentials. It provided social

⁸¹ Interview, Munir, 14/6/2019.

⁸² Interview, Munir, 16/4/2019.

membership in the Muslim Brotherhood's emerging network, illustrating that jobseekers' *wasta* depends not only on whom they know but also on *how* they are socially connected, much like Cookson and Persell (2008) argue that education often serves as a gateway to social membership within influential networks, a dynamic clearly at work in Munir's case. Furthermore, Munir's involvement in the security forces challenges the specific application of rational choice theory in explaining violence, which suggests that higher levels of education automatically reduce poverty and, therefore, the likelihood of individuals joining armed forces (Becker 1968; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). His case demonstrates that even educated elites can be recruited into violent, state-backed groups, not only as elites manipulating structural violence but also as active combatants. This challenges the selective application of rational choice theory, which posits that education and reduced poverty alone ensure non-involvement in armed activities.

Under the Islamist regime, secondary schools and universities expanded in access (if not quality), with these institutions often reinforcing the Islamist agenda and shaping social networks aligned with its values (Breidlid 2013). As shown in Figure 18, *wasta* through friends remains prevalent among men, often rooted in elite socialisation within schools. This pattern reflects broader gendered socialisation differences, as boys tend to form connections within their age group, while girls' social networks are typically more family-oriented (Ismail and Makki 1990:17). Munir's case, where he secured a job through his classmate Haroun, exemplifies this "single-generation world of *agemates*" that boys navigate more actively, bypassing public job announcements in favour of recruitment based on social membership and shared religious and political affiliations over merit.

Gamal: Grandson of Kordofan 'Arab' Tribal Head

Another group with privileged access to state positions includes sons and grandsons of tribal leaders in Kordofan. Their influential family members—fathers, grandfathers, or uncles who hold roles as representatives of North Kordofan's major tribes and attend Native Administration meetings—often grant these men favourable access to state jobs. Gamal, a grandson of a prominent 'Arab' tribal leader in Kordofan, exemplifies this. Although his

civilian officer position was publicly advertised, Gamal bypassed the recruitment process due to his grandfather's and father's influence.⁸³

All of Gamal's older brothers also held government jobs, including positions in a state-run munitions production company. In our conversation, Gamal shared his brothers' social media profiles, which contained posts praising El-Bashir even post-Revolution, confirming the close relationship between his tribe's leadership and the NCP. Gamal himself, part of *awlad al-jenna*, or 'Children of Heaven'—a group of Kezan youth supporting Haroun, sometimes serving militarily as his guard—boasted of having direct contact with Haroun. A photo I saw of Gamal in combat attire, holding a gun, underscored this role. His openly Kezan allegiance was unusual among the Gawamaa in El-Rahad during and after the Revolution, highlighting the divergent attitudes toward the El-Bashir regime across Kordofan tribes.

In addition to his government role, Gamal is a partner in a trading business. Since civil servants are barred from entrepreneurship, he keeps this venture hidden, taking trips to China with his high school classmate business partner while claiming to be ill. Given that Sudanese nationals require exit visas to travel, Gamal uses his Kezan-based networks and bribes airport officials to facilitate his travel and evade import taxes on goods. Although he hails from Kordofan, Gamal's status as the grandson of an 'Arab' tribal leader with close ties to the NCP allows him to access state jobs easily and circumvent structural barriers, such as visa and tax requirements, that the state poses for other businessmen. His ability to bypass these state-imposed barriers, while others must comply, reflects a form of structural violence and illustrates a continuum of violence, where power structures selectively support him while systematically excluding others.

6.3.3 Automatically Denied: Darfuri and Kordofani Jobseekers

Jobseekers from Kordofan frequently face discrimination and rejection when applying for publicly advertised state jobs, despite Sudan's formal commitment to civil service reform under the Juba Peace Agreement—a historic accord between the Sudanese government and

⁸³ Interview, Gamal, 30/8/2019.

the Sudanese Revolutionary Front, which includes five major rebel groups (UN 2011). Although bodies like the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) publicly promote equality, non-discrimination, and merit-based hiring (GoS 2018), the experiences of applicants from western Sudan reveal that these principles are inconsistently applied.

Hafiz: Fulani Humanitarian Worker

Hafiz, a Fulani from Nyala in South Darfur who now resides in Khartoum, came across a site manager vacancy with a European NGO on the HAC Labour Office's noticeboard and decided to apply. While technically overseen by civilian ministries, the HAC operates under the de facto control of Sudan's security and intelligence agencies, such as the General Intelligence Service (ex-NISS) and Military Intelligence, and is heavily involved in overseeing humanitarian work. The HAC's hiring practices reflect the state's intervention in the humanitarian sector, prioritising the recruitment of staff aligned with its interests. Hafiz applied multiple times, only to later learn from a European manager interviewing him that his CV had been screened out during previous rounds, possibly due to indicators in his background—such as his name, ethnicity, and educational history—that did not align with the criteria favoured by the HAC. When the European manager created a new position for him, Hafiz was harshly interrogated by the HAC, which questioned his socio-political background and implied he might be a spy. Hafiz believes this suspicion stemmed from his Fulani identity, which is often considered peripheral in Sudan due to its West African roots, outweighing his professional qualifications.

HAC's involvement in shortlisting and selecting national staff for humanitarian work is likely driven by the government's interest in using national employees as potential informants within I/NGOs, based on its view of humanitarian work as a security concern. During the Darfur conflict—dubbed “the first genocide of the 21st century” (Williams 2012:192)—the government faced accusations of narrative control and manipulation, drawing international criticism and ICC arrest warrants. To maintain influence over humanitarian agencies, the government prioritises candidates from Kezan families, often of Northern or Central Riverain Arab backgrounds with Islamist ties. This preference often results in the rejection of applicants who do not fit this ‘family profile’.

Hafiz's experience underscores the categorical discrimination faced by those outside the Kezan social classification. Despite being qualified and the fair recruitment policies set by the Juba Agreement, these jobseekers are systematically excluded from state job access. This intervention reflects the state's intent to shape humanitarian operations to suit its agenda and social networks, suggesting that, despite public job announcements, fairness and meritocracy frequently hold little weight in the recruitment process.

Mutaz: Messiria Teacher

Another case involving a Kordofan jobseeker, Mutaz, demonstrates how the state's control over labour access extends beyond INGO recruitment into other public sectors, including public school employment. Mutaz, a member of the Baggara Messiria, faced challenges in securing teaching positions due to his lack of influential *wasta*, despite being considered 'Arab' within Sudan's social hierarchy. After his family lost their cattle and settled in El-Rahad, Mutaz relied on his own efforts, using resources like the Labour Office to seek employment. Despite holding an English degree from Khartoum University and completing national service, he initially worked as a porter, petty trader, and teacher in Port Sudan.⁸⁴

After returning to El-Rahad, Mutaz sought a teaching position through the State Ministry of Education in El-Obeid but was unsuccessful. In 2022, he decided to try his luck in Nyala, South Darfur, where the escalating conflict had attracted both local and international NGOs as well as young Sudanese seeking work. Mutaz hoped to secure an INGO position, seeing it as a pathway to eventual migration to Canada. His ultimate aim was to save enough money to either continue working in Darfur or move to Canada to fulfil his long-term goal of marriage. While working with an international Christian NGO in South Darfur, Mutaz came across a public job announcement at the Labour Office for an English teacher position at a local secondary school. Though already earning a satisfactory income, he recognised the value of long-term job security, anticipating that INGOs might eventually withdraw as the conflict in the region subsided. With this in mind, he applied for the teaching position in Nyala, despite its lower pay.

⁸⁴ Interview, Mutaz, 10/9/2019.

For jobseekers from other regions, who often lack place-based social connections (Jonas 2009; Peluso and Ribot 2020:305) to access job information, Labour Offices in state capitals serve as critical resources. However, Mutaz faced discrimination and suspicion at the Labour Office, largely due to his previous roles with international Christian and European NGOs. The officer accused him of being a traitor and treated him with hostility. Mutaz desperately explained his challenging socio-economic circumstances and the necessity of working for the INGO to support his family in El-Rahad, eventually persuading the officer to allow him to apply. He ultimately secured the position and, as of 2023, continued to work in Nyala as a teacher.

These two cases illustrate how the Islamist government shapes access to labour opportunities through public announcements at Labour Offices, with security concerns and the aim to control humanitarian employment influencing recruitment. Labour Office agents wield significant power over applicants' fates, considering factors such as home address, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, educational background, and work history. Meeting these criteria does not guarantee employment, as agents make subjective decisions based on an applicant's perceived alignment with the government's interests. In Mutaz's case, the state's control over job access proved decentralised and personalised, allowing some flexibility in decision-making at the individual level. Mutaz's successful appeal to the Labour Office officer and securing of the teaching position, indicating that state control over labour access may weaken at the individual level.

Overall, these cases demonstrate how access to public sector employment is categorically shaped by socio-political identities tied to the candidate. Falling outside preferred social categories significantly lowers the chance of securing state employment, illustrating a form of categorical violence through systematic rejection based on identity rather than merit.

6.3.4 Provision of State Jobs as Political Manipulation for Rebels

The previous sections have highlighted the state's preference for favouring candidates deemed beneficial to the Islamist state, often selecting those from the 'NCP family' with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood to secure ideological alignment and minimise challenges to its agenda. However, state agents sometimes deviate from this pattern, strategically offering

job access to individuals from opposition groups, such as SPLM supporters in North Kordofan, with the aim of gradually ‘brainwashing’ them into alignment with the NCP.

Haroun’s approach to power consolidation in North Kordofan exemplifies this tactic. By integrating SPLM members into government roles, he aimed to maintain stability and subtly shift their political allegiances. A senior official familiar with this process noted, ‘Haroun is clever because he did not just employ NCP. Haroun mixed NCP and non-NCP at work. He even included SPLM in his office and gradually brainwashed them to become NCP’.⁸⁵ This political manoeuvre reflects an effort to expand influence and control by co-opting opposition members within state institutions.

The case of Taha, a Nuba engineer loyal to the SPLM, highlights the complexities of this strategy. Despite his Kezan colleagues’ attempts to recruit him into the NCP, Taha maintained his SPLM membership, facing workplace resistance and harassment as a result. However, Elnour, his manager from a nominally ‘Arab’ yet socially ‘mixed’ farming tribe in Kordofan, valued Taha’s qualifications, work ethic, and dedication to public service over political alignment. A devout Muslim whose car plays a Quranic recitation upon starting the engine, Elnour was occasionally characterised as a *koz* (an NCP/El-Bashir supporter) during the Revolution by some El-Rahad youth—suggesting, in the charged political climate, an association with the ‘wrong’ side. Yet, this case illustrates that ‘Islamist’ identities are not monolithic; significant diversity exists even within categorically ‘Islamist’ groups. Thus, while political affiliation often shapes job access, qualities like commitment and competence can also influence workplace dynamics and job retention.

Taha’s experience further illustrates that the workplace itself can be a site of violence, where discrimination based on social and political differences permeates everyday labour relations. This challenges rational choice assumptions regarding violence, which equate employment with peace, revealing instead that various forms of violence may persist and regenerate within the workplace, shaped by social and political forces beyond it. In this context, job access goes beyond recruitment, becoming an ongoing process of political manipulation and workplace control through daily interactions. Furthermore, this reflects the decentralised nature of Kezan operations, where individual discretion leads to varied

⁸⁵ Interview, Taha, Mohamed, 1/9/2019.

outcomes, sometimes allowing professional qualifications and work ethic to outweigh political membership.

This underscores the need to consider both political affiliations and other attributes, such as qualifications, skills, and dedication, when evaluating factors that shape recruitment and retention.⁸⁶ However, these broader qualities and social skills are often overlooked in employment generation projects focused on technical skills (see Chapter 7). Employers who value such attributes nonetheless recognise their importance for maintaining an effective and cohesive workforce.

6.3.5 Job Retention through Labour Relations: Access as Process

This section demonstrates that job retention within state institutions often hinges on the daily power dynamics and labour relations among employees, highlighting access as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. As Taha's experience illustrated, job access can be contested and renegotiated through workplace interactions, where access to employment is deeply tied to power relations (Foucault 1973). The state employs a range of strategies to enforce control, from formal incentives to informal observations and comments, which vary depending on the alignment of agents with Kezan ideology. For government employees who resist overt alignment with the NCP, these state mechanisms can manifest as workplace harassment.

For instance, Nasr, a university teaching staff member and pro-democracy activist from El-Rahad who taught Marxist theory, faced significant hostility for his non-Islamist stance. His Kezan colleagues reported his teaching content to NISS, leading to police harassment and intimidation.⁸⁷ In one extreme incident, he entered his classroom to find it decorated with posters labelling him a 'non-believer' due to his Marxist teachings, which some students and colleagues mistakenly equated with anti-Islamic sentiments. Such pressures ultimately forced Nasr to leave teaching temporarily, as the environment became unmanageable.

⁸⁶ Interview, Pastor Samuel, 20/4/2019.

⁸⁷ Interview, Nasr, 16/2/2019.

Changes in workplace environments following the influx of Islamist civil servants further altered the dynamics within state institutions. Sulaima, a former official in one of North Kordofan's state ministries, observed the harassment female employees endured, particularly regarding their attire. NCP supervisors scrutinised the women's headscarves and clothing, critiquing anything they deemed insufficiently modest as 'un-Islamic', fostering a hostile environment for these employees.⁸⁸

In Hawa's case, her career was stunted due to her refusal to align with the NCP, despite her vital contributions to state government productivity in El-Rahad. Hired before El-Bashir's coup, Hawa did not have to pass an 'NCP test' for her role. However, as colleagues began aligning with the NCP and witnessing the preferential treatment given to those within the Kezan circle, Hawa found herself sidelined.⁸⁹ Those who aligned with the party were promoted while she remained in the same position. Although Hawa's work contributed significantly to her department and the local economy, she was denied resources such as a vehicle and adequate office space and was pressured to manage additional responsibilities without pay adjustments. Her refusal to participate in a mandatory annual training event—where even civilian staff like Hawa were expected to perform military-style exercises in combat uniforms and specific footwear, ostensibly as preparation for emergencies—prompted her supervisor to threaten her with reassignment to Soderi, a remote city in northwestern North Kordofan known for its harsh climate and challenging living conditions.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, the state employed rewards to reinforce loyalty within its ranks. Teachers aligned with the NCP received additional payments, known locally as the "NCP incentive", which was given exclusively to NCP teachers.⁹¹ In 2019, a junior teacher in El-Obeid earned around 1,000 SDG (16–21 USD) per month, while top teachers received about 3,000 SDG (48–63 USD). Formal salary increases were limited to 100 SDG every four years, but an additional "NCP incentive" was offered exclusively to teachers affiliated with the party. This incentive amount varied between 50 and 200 SDG monthly, reflecting each teacher's

⁸⁸ Interview, Sulaima, 25/9/2019.

⁸⁹ Interview, Hawa, 2/9/2019.

⁹⁰ Interview, Hawa, 2/9/2019.

⁹¹ Interview, Ustaz Hassan, 21/4/2019.

perceived loyalty and usefulness, and even included a category for ‘fake’ Kezan members. “If you are not really one of [them], the pay is less”, explained Ustaz Hassan, a retired teacher. In close-knit communities, social affiliations are well known, and only those recognised as genuine NCP members received the full incentive. Just as Kezan membership is cultivated through family networks and youth activities from childhood, individuals’ identities as true Kezan members are gradually confirmed and reinforced within these social networks.

6.4 Citizenship and Violence: Access to Wage Labour Markets

This section focuses on Wells’ (1996) concept of citizenship stratification, which considers how workers are classified and organised according to their legal status, with non-citizen and surplus labour statuses often contributing to their disempowerment. While Wells’ concept centres on the legal dimension of citizenship, it is essential to adopt a broader view that includes political agency and identity, particularly in multi-ethnic societies such as Sudan (Kymlicka and Norman 2000). In such contexts, the legal definition of citizenship alone does not capture the complexities of Sudan’s social hierarchies, or the inequalities and discrimination rooted in regional and ethnic disparities. Assal (2011) argues that focusing on citizenship is crucial to addressing the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of groups from non-dominant regions, such as those outside Khartoum or the Nile Valley, offering a more nuanced understanding of social stratification in Sudan.

Citizenship formation in Sudan is a complex, socially constructed process, historically influenced by race and ethnicity in colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial identity projects, which often categorised individuals as ‘Northern’ or ‘Southern’, ‘Arab’ or ‘African’ (Idris 2019). This ongoing ‘crisis of citizenship’ in Sudan has roots in an unaddressed legacy of slavery and colonialism, shaping a dualistic characterisation of labour (as discussed in Chapter 5) and deepening inequalities in job access, both at family and societal levels (Sections 6.2 and 6.3). Furthermore, a statement by a senior Ministry of Labour official asserting that rural labour markets are beyond their jurisdiction illustrates how such

structural disempowerment is normalised for ‘non-Northerner’ Sudanese.⁹² It is crucial to recognise that social inequalities intersect not only with race and ethnicity but also with gender—such as in wage disparities between men and women (Figure 16).

This section examines wage hierarchies to understand stratification within Sudan’s labour markets. Despite Sudan’s ratification of the Equal Remuneration Convention (ILO 1951) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (ILO 1958), considerable wage discrepancies persist across social groups. Through a mixed-method analysis of participants’ wages relative to their social backgrounds and types of *wasta*, this section highlights that socio-economically disadvantaged groups—those historically associated with slavery, as well as ‘Africans’, South Sudanese, Nuba, Christians, and women—are disproportionately represented in lower-wage labour. These findings support Sikainga’s (1996) assertion that precolonial labour ideologies, particularly slavery, influenced the composition and conditions of the wage labour force that emerged during the British-Egyptian Condominium. These effects persist in present-day Sudanese labour hierarchies, exemplifying structural violence as a continuum of violence embedded in socio-economic structures.

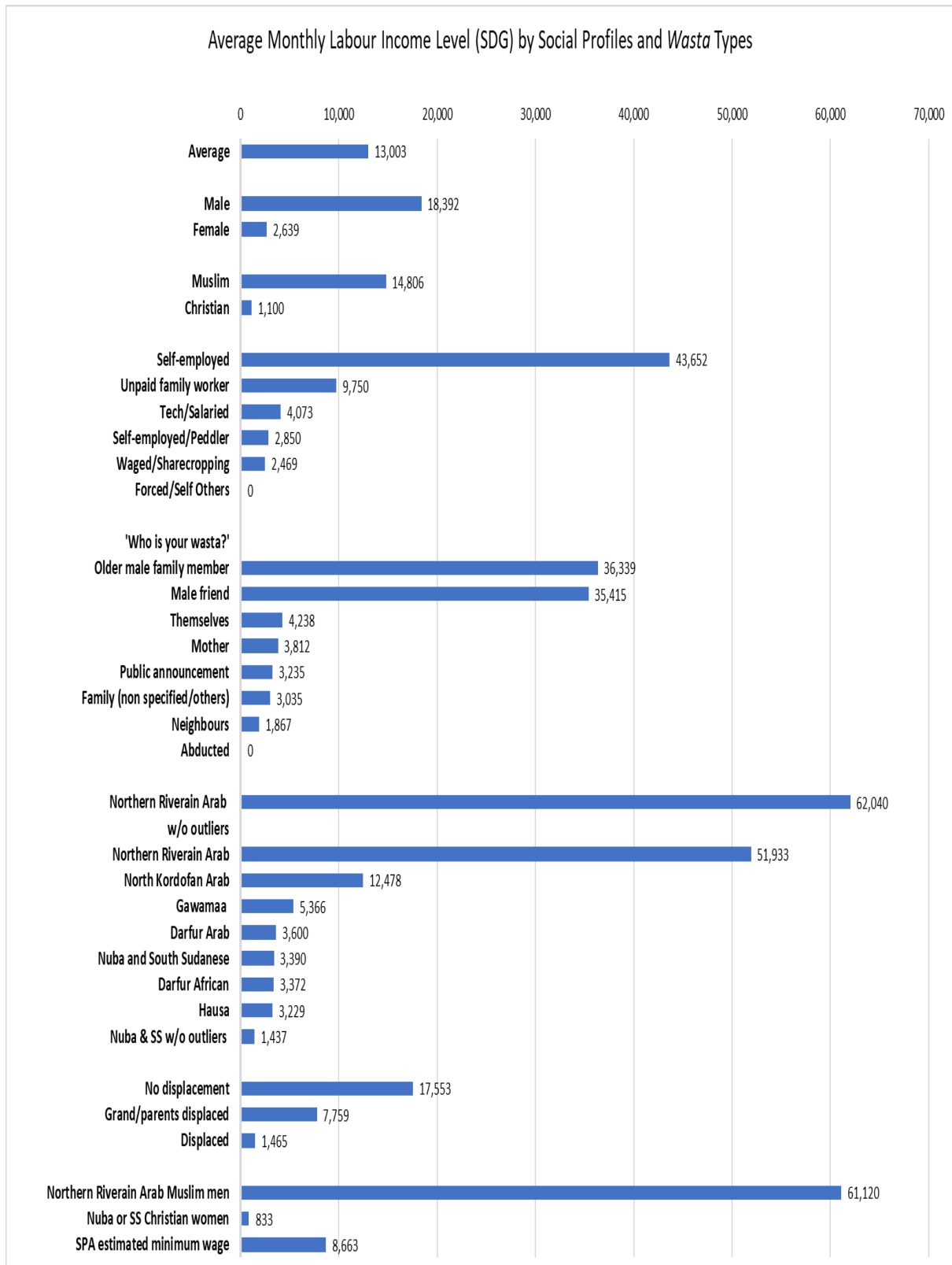
6.4.1 Citizenship and Income Inequality

To delve into citizenship stratification and its impact on rural agricultural labour markets, this section begins by examining wage levels across various social groups. Although wages alone do not fully define citizenship status, they offer a glimpse into how society and family value an individual’s labour. This connection between social valuation and the often-unpaid nature of women’s reproductive labour was explored in Chapter 5. Here, I examine wage levels and power dynamics among North Kordofan workers by categorising income disparities according to social profiles, a method drawn from Sutcliffe’s (2001) study on income inequality. Figure 20 summarises average labour income by social profiles and *wasta* types that helped jobseekers secure employment.⁹³

⁹² Interview, Director of Policy, MoLHRD, 26/3/2019.

⁹³ Labour income is “the amount that employed people earn by working” (ILO 2019) as opposed to capital income.

Figure 19. Sources of Income Inequality: Average Wage Level by Social Profiles and Wasta Types in El-Rahad and El-Obeid



Gender and Religion

Figure 20 reveals stark income disparities among social groups, shaped by social networks, types of *wasta*, and work relations. As shown previously in Figure 16 (Section 5.3.2.3), male workers in North Kordofan earn an average of 18,392 SDG per month, nearly seven times the average female income of 2,639 SDG. This gender-based pay gap extends to specific occupations, such as agricultural labour, where males (3,000 SDG) earn more than double their female counterparts (1,300 SDG), echoing societal views on gendered labour productivity (Section 5.2.3). Regarding religious differences, Muslims earn an average of 14,806 SDG—nearly fourteen times the income of Christian workers (1,100 SDG).

Work Relations

Work relations further reveal income stratifications. Self-employed individuals, including business owners and large-scale traders, have the highest income levels (43,652 SDG), followed by ‘unpaid’ family workers in family enterprises (9,750 SDG), such as those working in transportation or boat businesses. In North Kordofan, ‘unpaid’ does not mean workers receive no return; rather, it reflects the informal structure where returns are not in daily or monthly wages, and some workers have high autonomy over income distribution within the family business. Tech/salaried workers, often white-collar employees in government, hospitals, schools, or offices, rank next (4,073 SDG). Self-employed peddlers, such as cart vendors or milk sellers, are categorised separately due to notable differences in work dynamics, earning just 2,850 SDG—a fraction, approximately one-fifteenth, of what the other self-employed group earns. Since all ‘self-employed’ workers are broadly grouped in Sudan’s national labour survey,⁹⁴ examining their labour relations and work dynamics offers a more precise basis for classification. This approach highlights wage disparities within similarly labelled categories, providing a clearer view of income inequality. Wage work (2,469 SDG), including daily wage labour and sharecropping, ranks lowest in income. For added context, two types of ‘wageless’ work, including Nuba SPLM soldiers and Dinka

⁹⁴ Interview, Motwakil, 12/9/2019.

alcohol producers, provide further insights into work without wages, aside from unpaid reproductive labour.

Methods of Accessing Jobs

The income hierarchy is also influenced by how individuals access employment, highlighting the role of *wasta*. Jobseekers supported by older male relatives (36,339 SDG) or male friends (35,415 SDG), such as prominent figures like Haroun, earn the highest incomes. Other access methods rank as follows: self-accessed jobs (4,238 SDG), mother's assistance (3,812 SDG), public announcements (3,235 SDG), unspecified family help (3,035 SDG), neighbours (1,867 SDG), and forced recruitment (0 SDG). The income gap between those supported by paternal figures and those assisted by mothers underscores life histories indicating differences in *wasta* quality, largely influenced by economic power, social networks, and the amount of time spent socialising (Section 5.2.2).

Ethnicity

Labour income disparities also reflect ethnic backgrounds, with Northern Riverain Arabs (Shaigiyya, Jaalyin, and Danagla) and early Islamised and Arabised 'Ottoman' Sudanese (e.g., Maghariba) earning the highest incomes (51,933 SDG, or 62,040 SDG without an outlier), followed by North Kordofan Arabs (Messiria, Hawazma, Kababish, and Shanabla) with 12,478 SDG. Specific tribes with prominent social identities in El-Rahad, such as Gawamaa, earn an average of 5,366 SDG. This is followed by Darfur Arabs (Maali tribe, 3,600 SDG), Darfur Africans (Daju and Bargo tribes, 3,372 SDG), Hausa and Fallata groups (3,229 SDG), and Nuba and South Sudanese workers, whose average income is 3,390 SDG, dropping to 1,437 SDG when excluding an outlier.

Race

The income analysis by ethnic group and gender highlights the challenges facing marginalised groups in accessing North Kordofan's rural labour markets, underscoring the

role of racialised classifications such as 'Arab' and 'African'. Workers identified as African, including Nuba, South Sudanese, Hausa, and Darfur Africans, typically earn lower incomes, while Arab-identified workers tend to earn more. The Gawamaa, who self-identify as Arab but historically mixed with Africans, sit between these classifications, reflecting their position within Kordofan's racial and ethnic hierarchy.

Forced Displacement

Historical forced displacement significantly affects labour life histories, labour market access, and wage levels. Among three displacement-related categories, individuals displaced by conflict, such as the 2013 Abu Kershola conflict or the Second Sudanese Civil War, earn the least, with an average of 1,465 SDG. Those whose parents or grandparents were displaced during the First Sudanese Civil War or by mechanised farming expansion earn 7,759 SDG. Those without a displacement history earn 17,553 SDG. It is worth noting that even those without displacement histories may have left previous homes due to a lack of public services, such as water provision, or education opportunities, enduring structural violence (Farmer 1996, 2004) that continues to shape their labour market access and incomes.

Lowest Labour Income and Minimum Wage

In North Kordofan, the lowest earners are typically Christian women from Nuba or South Sudanese backgrounds, often recent displacees with limited access to labour opportunities and weak family networks. Many work in low-wage or wageless jobs, earning an average monthly income of 833 SDG (14 USD as of January 2019). While this surpasses Sudan's minimum wage of 425 SDG (set in January 2013) (Sudan Tribune 2013), at the time it was worth 97 USD based on the 2013 exchange rate. However, inflation and currency devaluation have since rendered the 425 SDG minimum wage increasingly outdated.

In December 2018, the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) estimated that a family of five outside Khartoum would need at least 8,664 SDG (Radio Dabanga 2018) monthly for basic necessities, and 15,000 SDG in Khartoum. This figure is nearly ten times the income of

the lowest-earning group but only one-seventh that of the highest earners—Northern Riverain Muslim men. Access to job opportunities for these men is often facilitated by older male relatives or influential friends (Section 6.2.1), often through family businesses or government roles. Northern Riverain Muslim men earn 73–91 times more than Nuba or South Sudanese Christian women.

This analysis reveals that gender, religion, race, ethnicity, and a history of forced displacement significantly impact income inequality in Sudan’s labour markets, highlighting the precarious position of wage workers, especially in conflict settings where labour’s bargaining power is weakened in relation to capital (Cramer and Weeks 1997).

6.4.2 Access to Rural Wage Labour Markets: Gender, Religion, Race and Ethnicity

This section provides a closer examination of rural wage labour markets, focusing on sector-specific dynamics in El-Rahad and El-Obeid and analysing how gender, ethnicity, and citizenship stratification shape access to wage employment. The previous analysis identified the lowest earners among wage labourers as female Christian workers from Nuba and South Sudanese backgrounds, often with histories of forced displacement. Here, we aim to understand the specific wage labour sectors in these regions, how gender and ethnic divisions manifest within each sector, the associated income levels, and the profiles of typical employers and employee groups to explain the patterns observed.

Although previous studies by Babiker (2011) and El-Bagir et al. (1984) categorise rural wage employment in Sudan primarily within irrigated schemes and mechanised farms, the El-Rahad context reveals a more diverse range of agricultural activities and additional wage labour sectors beyond these classifications. Table 9 provides an overview of these sectors, showing how gender and ethnicity shape access and illustrating the presence of ethnic divisions in specific sectors.

Table 9. Wage Labourers by Sector, Gender, Ethnicities, Labour Incomes and Their ‘Bosses’

Wage Labour Sector	Gender	Wage Labouring Tribes	Average Monthly Labour Income (SDG)	Employer/Boss Tribes
Domestic	Female	Hausa	1,800	Gawamaa, Jaalyyin
Agricultural	Female	Gawamaa, Shanabla, Nuba, Dinka, Hausa	1,702	(North El-Rahad and El-Rahad Town)Gawamaa, Jaalyyin; (West El-Rahad) Jallaba Hwora, Bedariya, Shaigiyya, Messiria/Baggara (East El-Rahad) Shaigiyya,
	Male	Gawamaa, Nuba, Dinka, Hausa	3,571	(South El-Rahad) Shaigiyya and other 'Arab' groups
Market/Building	Male	Nuba, Shanabla, Dinka, Daju	3,682	Gawamaa, Jaalyyin, Nuba (supervisor)
	Female	Nuba	1,000	Nuba
Pastoral	Male	Shanabla, Gawamaa, Dinka, Bargo, Falata, Missiria	3,600	Miseriya, Hawazma, Shanabla
Fighting (1)	Male	(SPLM) Nuba, Dinka	0	Nuba

(1) Not including the state's formal or informal armed groups as they are not wage labour work

6.4.2.1 Domestic Work

During the Islamic sultanate period, merchant capitalism led middle-class and merchant families to employ enslaved women for domestic tasks (Section 4.2.3.2). In El-Rahad today, domestic wage work is predominantly performed by Hausa girls and women, with some beginning as young as five years old, working in elite households of families like the Jaalyyin and Gawamaa. Their duties involve household cleaning, laundry, and sometimes washing dishes and fetching water; however, they note that these last two tasks are often unpaid but expected as part of their role.⁹⁵ Cooking is typically managed by female members of the employing family.

Unlike seasonal work, domestic tasks in this sector are stable year-round, with monthly earnings averaging 1,800 SDG. Pay depends on the tasks performed, for instance, earning 120 SDG for washing and ironing 96 pieces of clothing over two days in 2019 (around 2 USD). Most domestic workers do not take holidays, as unpaid leave directly reduces their

⁹⁵ Interview, Zahra, 29/8/2019.

income. Without formal social security, support during emergencies or special occasions is often ad hoc, depending on the employer's willingness. As of 2019, their wage of 1,800 SDG was one of the lowest in El-Rahad, raising the possibility that wage increases for domestic workers have not kept pace with inflation, potentially due to a lack of negotiating power.

Employment in this sector is often arranged through paternal figures—fathers or grandfathers, who secure roles for their daughters as domestic maids to aid family finances.⁹⁶ Amal, a domestic worker and eldest daughter, has been doing domestic work since she was five, both at home and outside. Her father, a Tijjaniya sheikh, enrolled her in a Sudanese Quranic school, *khalwa*, rather than a regular school, which she attended to sixth grade.⁹⁷ Most of her younger siblings attended standard schools, and one even completed university with support from the family employing Amal. Now divorced and childless, Amal has struggled with mental health issues stemming from marital abuse, contrasting with her younger sister, a university graduate with an office job and engagement prospects.

Another worker, Zahra, began her domestic role at six, arranged by her grandfather through his Sufi network. Zahra has a strong bond with her employer's family, even sharing childhood memories with the son of the household. Although aware that her wage is below market rate, Zahra has not requested a pay rise to avoid seeming 'greedy'. She describes her role as being 'half-paid but half-(unpaid) family work',⁹⁸ reflecting her sense of family loyalty despite the low wage.

The Hausa, part of the broader Fallata ethnic group alongside the Fulani, trace their roots to West Africa and have been settled in Sudan since the late 19th century (Duffield 1981). Their neighbourhood, El-Salaam, lies strategically between their common workplaces—the elite residential area and the zariba (Figure 7)—highlighting their longstanding presence. Brought to Sudan by the British for colonial irrigation projects, the Hausa remain classified under colonial labels like 'Nigerian', with their '*muwallid*' status (born in Sudan of non-Sudanese parents) distinguishing them from other, typically Arab or European groups (Holt 1958:14–15). As *Gharraba* (western Sudanese), they are regarded as peripheral in Sudan's

⁹⁶ Hausa mothers are also active in facilitating employment for their children. One Hausa man found his agricultural wage work through his mother and cousins. Interview, Awad, 29/8/2019.

⁹⁷ Interview, Amal, 30/8/2019.

⁹⁸ Interview, Zahra, 29/8/2019.

socio-political hierarchy, limiting their influence in towns like El-Rahad, where they lack ethnic-based collective power relative to dominant groups like the Gawamaa.

In Sudan, the concept of foreignness plays a significant role in accessing domestic wage work. Unlike domestic service in other African countries, often recruited from within family networks (Hepburn 2016), in Sudan, domestic work remains largely outside kin or ethnic ties. In Khartoum, for instance, young Ethiopian women dominate this sector, possibly due to their lack of local connections, which makes boundary-setting easier for employers. Domestic maids also gain unique insights into family life, prompting employers to favour workers who are outside their social circles, thereby minimising potential gossip. Employers also prefer domestic workers from less powerful tribes, who are perceived as unlikely to challenge authority and as more suited to the demanding work involved. Consequently, the perceived West African origins and lower socio-economic status of the Hausa align with the preferred domestic maid profile.

However, being foreign and socio-economically disadvantaged is not the only expectation of domestic workers. Trustworthiness is also highly valued. In this regard, the Hausas' reputation as hardworking and devout Muslims greatly contributes to their access to domestic service.⁹⁹ Additionally, they are often stereotyped as being physically stronger and possessing heightened sexual prowess compared to typical Sudanese, and they are perceived to look younger than their actual ages.¹⁰⁰ These 'compliments', however, only serve to justify and perpetuate their engagement in poorly paid, physically demanding, and restrictive domestic work.

Many domestic workers express a strong dislike for their roles. Amal, for instance, remarked that she "hates everything about [the domestic] work".¹⁰¹ Yet, longstanding ties with their employers keep them trapped in these roles. Because their initial employment is arranged by paternal family members, leaving the job could strain relations between their family and the employing elite. Domestic workers often feel a sense of care and affection from their employer's family, which, despite the arduous and 'dirty' nature of the work, complicates their decision to leave. Some of their siblings also receive financial or material support from

⁹⁹ Observation and open-ended discussion, Hakim, 27/8/2019.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Khalid, 25/8/2019.

¹⁰¹ Interview, Amal, 30/8/2019.

the employer's family—benefits not necessarily directed toward the workers themselves but which further tether them to the job. As a result, domestic servants frequently continue in these roles, motivated not by personal desire but by a reluctance to disappoint anyone.

For Hausa fathers and grandfathers, placing a daughter or granddaughter in a powerful local family's household is akin to a 'deposit' for the family's protection in times of hardship. Educational expenses and significant life events, such as marriage, are among the 'emergencies' for which the employer's family is expected to provide financial and material assistance. Thus, domestic work functions as a form of social security for the Hausa family, accessed through the hard and unfree labour of their daughters. Aware of these complex dynamics, these women feel unable to simply leave due to years of interdependence on both sides. Any complaints about precarious work conditions and low pay risk shaming their two 'families', a burden the daughters cannot bear. This situation exemplifies how 'voice' and 'exit' are constrained, leaving 'loyalty' as the only feasible option, as Hirschman (1970) describes (Section 2.4).

6.4.2.2 Agricultural Work

Agricultural wage labour markets in El-Rahad encompass men and women from diverse local ethnic groups, contrasting with the primarily female-dominated domestic service sector. Historically, male slaves worked in agricultural cultivation during the Islamic sultanate period (Section 4.2.3.2), a practice that evolved under the British-Egyptian Condominium when labour shortages in colonial irrigation projects led to the mobilisation of Sudanese ex-slaves and West African immigrants (the Fallata), into agricultural wage labour (Section 4.4.1). In present-day El-Rahad, these groups, now classified by ethnic affiliation—including the Nuba, Dinka, and Hausa—continue to play a prominent role in agricultural wage work, joined by local groups like the Gawamaa and Shanabla.

The Nuba and Dinka workers are distributed across El-Rahad, except in the north, where Gawamaa labour predominates. Many Nuba and Dinka workers are engaged in generational patron-client relationships, working for the same landlords, often alongside family members. The Hausa typically work in more structured environments owned by Northerners, such as irrigated or mechanised farms in the eastern and southern regions or

agricultural processing companies in El-Rahad Town. This employment pattern reflects their unique immigration and labour history, as their settlement in Sudan was often coordinated by the colonial government and Northern Sudanese agents.

El-Rahad's predominantly Gawamaa population consists largely of farmers, many of whom also participate in agricultural wage labour. This engagement is shaped by historical and geographical factors, as the Gawamaa having a legacy of seasonal migration to work on the Gezira Scheme. Some Gawamaa, whose ancestors worked as wage labourers in this colonial project, accumulated enough savings to invest in land in El-Rahad, transitioning from labourers to landlords (O'Brien 1986). However, Gawamaa peasants who have recently migrated from rural villages to El-Rahad Town typically lack land ownership near the town, pushing them to engage in agricultural wage labour to support their families. Many also rent land to cultivate cash and subsistence crops alongside wage work.

This shift has led to distinct class divisions and varying mechanisms for accessing wage labour markets within the Gawamaa community. Gender differences are also evident, as Gawamaa women, relative to other female agricultural labourers, often have better access to jobs requiring greater care, such as those in high-value fruit gardens. This advantage likely reflects both their higher social standing and longstanding local reputation as skilled farmers.

The Shanabla form a distinct group that does not align with the previously discussed categories. Traditionally regarded as *abbala* (camel herders) and commonly identified as 'Arabs', the Shanabla's socio-economic standing declined following the 1980s famines and insufficient government response. This period saw many Shanabla families lose their herds, leading them to abandon their nomadic lifestyles, settle in El-Rahad Town, and turn to agricultural wage labour.

Among the Shanabla, it is primarily the women who participate in agricultural wage labour, while men tend to work in pastoralist and market-related roles. Initially, the Shanabla women I spoke with claimed not to work, likely reflecting stronger patriarchy within Shanabla families and a reluctance to acknowledge wage labour. However, TUS data confirms that Shanabla women, particularly older married ones, do engage in agricultural

labour. This pattern aligns with the community's general preference for women to remain within the household, especially unmarried daughters (Section 6.2.2.2).

Shanabla women adopt a low-profile approach to wage work; unlike other groups who gather daily at the El-Rahad market, they travel directly from their peripheral settlements to the farms, often without prior arrangement. Their participation is also seasonal, mainly aligning with field-based cultivation activities such as cleaning and land preparation, which occur between May and July (Table 10).

The following table summarises El-Rahad's seasonal work schedule, compiled from TUS data, participant interviews, and work-life histories. The colour coding reflects different seasonal phases: darkest green indicates peak season, medium green shows the regular season, light green represents pre-season, and white signifies no season. These variations reveal the close connection between natural cycles and work availability for different groups in El-Rahad. For example, pastoral communities rely on the north-south wind direction, which influences livestock movement as animals detect the scent of fresh grass and move accordingly. The calendar highlights work availability throughout the year, including the dry season. Contrary to assumptions by international development policymakers in Khartoum that dry seasons lack agricultural work, this schedule reveals continuous, seasonally adaptive labour opportunities in rural localities. While many young men may temporarily seek urban employment, this does not imply a complete lack of rural work or an automatic rise in violence, as is sometimes presumed, especially in North Kordofan.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Based on the examination of news articles, no increase in incidents of violence during the dry season was found in the state of North Kordofan in the years 2018 and 2019.

Table 10. Local Seasonal Work in El-Rahad

Group	Local Seasonal Work	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Nature	Rain												
	Flood (seasonal river/ <i>khor</i>)												
	Wind direction					North to South				South to North			
Pastoral	Nomads and animals movement (1)					South to North							
Dry season	Garden (2)												
	Allah Kareem tomato												
	Gum arabic												
	Cotton												
	Building season												
	Labour migration (3)												
Rainy season	Field-based (4)												
	Subsistence farming												
Year-round	Agricultural portering/processing												
	Agricultural traders										Rest		
Notes													
	Pre-season												
	Season												
	Peak and harvest season												
	(1)	Animals smell the grass on the wind and move towards it.											
	(2)	Tomato, rocket, lemon, guava, mango, lady's fingers/okra, chilli, onion, aubergines											
	(3)	To El-Obeid, Khartoum, East (Dinka/Nuba)											
	(4)	Sesame, hibiscus, peanuts for commercial purposes											

In examining wage labour dynamics, it is also crucial to consider landlords and employers, as access to agricultural labour markets in El-Rahad is shaped by social and geographical structures. In El-Rahad Town, the primary landlord/employer groups are the Gawamaa and Jaalyin, who hold considerable power. In western El-Rahad, specifically in Hageina, influence shifts towards the Jallaba Hwara and Bedariya, who dominate the El-Obeid region. Further southwest, Baggara landlords, particularly the Messiria, have a stronger presence, reflecting their proximity to their homeland near El-Fula in West Kordofan.

In the southern and eastern regions of El-Rahad, where soil fertility is higher, a notable number of Northerners, such as the Jaalyin and Shaigiyya, have established themselves alongside the postcolonial government. These regions are more mechanised and labour is organised with a strong focus on profit maximisation. Hausa wage labourers, often working in family groups, commute from their homes in the east. In the more remote southern areas, where access is more difficult due to the rurality and higher clay content in the soil, only men are employed as wage labourers, working long hours and often staying overnight

in field tents. In contrast, northern areas with sandier soil have lower yields but incur similar labour costs, resulting in a preference for hiring wage labourers within the extended Gawamaa family network.

Gender-based wage disparities persist, with men earning an average monthly wage of 3,571 SDG compared to 1,702 SDG for women. Men are able to secure more consistent wage work throughout the day, month, or year, while women are often limited to morning or afternoon shifts due to household responsibilities. Furthermore, prevailing assumptions that women are less productive in farming (see Section 5.2.3) contribute to lower wage rates for female workers, adding barriers to accessing higher-paying jobs. These dynamics will be explored further in the following discussion.

6.4.2.3 Market and Building Work

Market

The market and building sectors are central to wage labour in rural towns and large villages across Kordofan, with work availability closely tied to seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and pastoralism. The Hausa, for instance, contribute to these sectors through roles in agricultural processing and transportation, participating in the broader process of 'servicification', which emphasises how much of the final value in manufactured goods now derives from service-related activities, such as cleaning and transporting agricultural products (Cramer, Di John, and Sender 2018:3). This shift underscores the rising significance of non-cultivation tasks in the value chain of production (ibid.), integrating market and service activities into rural wage labour economies.

In El-Rahad, market and building sector jobs primarily attract men from Nuba, Shanabla, Dinka, and Daju backgrounds, who earn an average wage of 3,571 SDG monthly. In addition, a small number of Christian Nuba women engage in market-related wage work, with a monthly income around 1,000 SDG. Porterage work, in particular, spikes during the harvest season (Table 10), and workers often gain access by actively seeking opportunities in the market area. Some porters operate independently, categorised as self-employed peddlers or porters with their own carts, catering to specific patrons, typically prominent traders.

One example is Samer, a Daju porter, who depends on a jallaba trader for daily tasks. Every morning, Samer seeks work from this trader, who provides him with a combination of daily wage-based and piece-rate jobs. Although Samer technically owns his cart (purchased by selling his family's last cattle during the 1984-1985 drought), he remains reliant on this patron for consistent income. Often assigned non-work errands, like fetching breakfast and being 'paid' with small tips or gifts, Samer's dependency limits his bargaining power, binding him to the trader's demands. This illustrates distinctions even within the self-employed group, where those classified as self-employed peddlers experience labour dynamics akin to wage labourers, reliant on daily tasks and lacking full agency. Despite having their own tools of production, self-employed peddlers face challenges in negotiating pay, often without the autonomy typically associated with self-employment.

Porters frequently self-identify as informal workers, acknowledging the precarious nature of their work. While they express a sense of shame about their employment, they do not let it undermine their self-esteem. Many maintain a sense of pride in their ability to choose the type of work they engage in and contribute economically despite the insecure nature of their work. In addition to actively seeking opportunities, their access to employment is constrained not by a lack of effort but by the types of jobs they are systematically excluded from due to barriers, such as social hierarchies and a lack of social networks. Many porters come from agro-pastoralist or pastoralist backgrounds, having abandoned nomadic lifestyles following the 1984-1985 drought, which led to the loss of their animals and forced settlement.

Family histories illustrate disparities in the adaptation to sedentary life. For example, while Samer's family managed a relatively smoother transition, that of Hamza, a Shanabla porter, struggled significantly. Differences in animal types contributed to these challenges; while some pastoralists successfully migrated southward with animals to survive, those who owned vulnerable sheep could not withstand fungal infections in wetter southern areas. Consequently, Shanabla families with sheep were unable to migrate south, leading to a substantial loss of livestock, including camels.¹⁰³ This case further reflects how migration

¹⁰³ Interview, Hamza, 10/9/2019.

paths of different livestock—camels northward, cattle southward—impacted these communities' survival and subsequent transitions to sedentary life.

Building

After the harvest season in November, some porters shift to wage work in building and brickmaking during the dry season. This building work is generally ad-hoc, with tasks varying daily. In El-Rahad, Nuba men, primarily from diverse Nuba subgroups, dominate the brickmaking sector, often supervising and organising tasks for daily-wage builders. Mustafa, a Nuba Sobei, manages a brickmaking business with friends, employing twelve wage labourers who have worked with him consistently for three to four years due to their diligence. For Mustafa, brickmaking is “almost social, like half-work and half-play” as he enjoys working alongside his close friends.¹⁰⁴

Pastor Samuel, another leader in the building sector, is an electrician and Catholic pastor of Nuba Abur background. For him, hiring peaceful, trustworthy, and faithful individuals is crucial, given the safety concerns in building work. He carefully selects workers he knows well, as he is responsible if anything goes missing in a customer's home. During interviews with various Nuba groups, a recurring emphasis on qualifications and attitude emerged as key factors for accessing jobs, rather than relying on tribe-based networks. This reflects Taha's earlier comment (Section 5.4.2) about limited tribal support among the Nuba, who often lack the privileges of more dominant groups and consequently face distinct employment challenges.

6.4.2.4 Pastoralist Work

In the pastoral sector, wage labour predominantly involves men from pastoralist and agro-pastoralist groups, including the Shanabla, Dinka, Messiria, Bargo, and Fallata, with an average monthly wage of 3,600 SDG. As cattle or sheep walkers, labourers collect animals from the homes of sedentarised Baggara and guide them to graze for four to five hours each

¹⁰⁴ Interview, Mustafa, 15/7/2019.

day. A Messiria animal owner remarked that even a Gawamaa, traditionally a farming group, might be hired as long as he is trustworthy.¹⁰⁵ Dinka men also access cattle-walking jobs due to their historical association with cattle, despite past conflicts with the Baggara during the Sudanese Civil Wars (Jok 2001; Sikainga 1996).

In the nomads' market at Abu Algor (Figure 4), men from the Shanabla, Bargo, Messiria, and Fallata tribes work as middlemen, selling livestock, such as goats, sheep, camels, and cattle, on behalf of animal owners. Typically, if a wealthy Shanabla family wants to sell camels, they will hire a relative as a waged seller. Similarly, Baggara cattle owners, including the Hawazma and Messiria, often employ men from the Messiria, Bargo, or Fallata groups due to their shared herding background and expertise. These dynamics reveal fluidity in associating ethnic groups with specific work, showing that while family and tribal knowledge remain important, changing circumstances allow for greater occupational flexibility. For instance, the Gawamaa, primarily farmers, also engage in animal-related work, while the Fallata, though mainly involved in agriculture in El-Rahad, also work in cattle herding—a role more typical for them in other areas, such as West Kordofan and Darfur.

The visible, fierce negotiations in animal trading are supported by the invisible, unpaid labour of pastoral women, who provide essential care for the animals at home. Shanabla women, for example, feed and care for the animals, often without compensation. Aisha, whose main income comes from selling milk in El-Rahad Town, explains, "women's work is to feed animals once a day, give them *doraa* (white sorghum) at 5 pm". As well as feeding them, Aisha frequently stays up all night guarding the animals from theft. When Aisha's family approached a local *omda*, a middle-level tribal chief, of the Gawamaa tribe for assistance with theft issues, their outsider status as Shanabla meant that they received little, if any, support.¹⁰⁶ Living on Gawamaa land, they feel detached from the local power networks, and existing tensions between pastoralists and farmers over resources further complicate the relationship. This lack of protection compels women like Aisha to sacrifice significant time and energy to secure their family's assets overnight. Their unremunerated, home-based labour underscores the gendered, invisible work that supports both capitalist

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Gisma, 11/9/2019.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Aisha, 3/9/2019.

profit-making and the wage labour of their male relatives, highlighting a form of labour often excluded from formal recognition, yet essential to pastoralist production.

6.4.2.5 Wageless Bonded Fighting Work

The history of fighting in Sudan has long involved local communities, with men being drawn into conflict as a form of labour. During the Turko-Egyptian period, darker-skinned men, such as the Nuba and South Sudanese, were enslaved as soldiers for the Viceroy's 'black army' (Section 4.3.1.1). More recently in Kordofan, men from various social backgrounds, including elite northern Islamists, voluntarily joined armed groups such as the PDF (Section 6.3.2) and were rewarded for their involvement. In contrast, ex-soldiers of the SPLM, primarily from Nuba and South Sudanese communities, fought without any form of remuneration, leaving them in a perpetual wageless status. This underscores the importance of understanding the mechanisms by which access to this wageless fighting labour was structured, especially as many of these ex-SPLM soldiers transitioned to wage labour roles upon escaping from the SPLM. Examining this forced participation sheds light on the broader dynamics of labour access in North Kordofan, including the continuum from wageless to waged forms of labour.

Their forced 'access' to unremunerated bonded labour was determined by factors such as family status, home location, and social categories such as ethnicity. Hazim, a former SPLM soldier from a Nuba tribe who now works seasonally as a market porter, builder, and agricultural labourer, was forcibly taken from his home one morning by the SPLM, along with his older brothers.¹⁰⁷ They were harshly punished for not joining voluntarily when the SPLM had previously called for soldiers in their South Kordofan village. The SPLM specifically targeted 'orphans' and economically disadvantaged youth, viewing them as more susceptible to manipulation. Although Hazim's father had died of "hunger and water retention in his stomach" three years prior—four years into the civil war—Hazim was not strictly an 'orphan' since his mother was alive and caring for her children. However, the

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Hazim, 22/4/2019.

absence of a father effectively categorised Hazim and his brothers as ‘orphans’, making them more vulnerable to forced recruitment by the SPLM.

Hazim’s experience, shared by his school teacher Ustaz Hassan (Section 5.4.2) and other abducted villagers, reveals the complex dynamics of coerced participation within the SPLM. Their forced recruitment was framed not only through control and fear but also under the banner of ‘family’ and solidarity, with the SPLM promoting the slogan ‘All the family must come!’—as a call to collective duty. Only sons were typically exempted, recognised as essential heirs within their families. For Hazim and others, being part of the wider tribal ‘family’ often meant an expectation to ‘work for the protection of the family’ without pay, even at the cost of severe physical abuse or the risk of death. The communal solidarity and ‘love’ for protecting both his ethnic family and the SPLM ‘family’ normalised and justified his entry into violent labour relations, rendering the coercion and exploitation within the movement almost invisible.

Their account challenges the oversimplified opportunity-based rationale proposed by Collier and Hoeffler (2000), which suggests that individuals from impoverished backgrounds in developing nations voluntarily join insurgencies for economic gain. Hazim’s story reveals a contrasting reality, where many young men are forcibly abducted and coerced into joining rebel forces. This underscores the limitations of a purely economic framework in understanding the complexities of forced participation in conflict.

6.5 Conclusion: ‘Social’, Family, and Violence in Structuring Access to Conflict Affected Rural Labour Regimes

This chapter has examined the underlying dynamics of labour access in rural labour regimes in Kordofan, asking critical questions about how social memberships and hierarchies regulate who gains employment, who intermediates, under what conditions, and for what underlying reasons. By probing these questions, it became clear that the longstanding histories of Islamisation and sedentarisation intersect with gender, age, race, ethnicity, and class to influence employment opportunities within Kordofan’s rural labour regimes. Central to these dynamics is the role of ‘family’—whether biological, tribal, or political—as a deeply

embedded social institution in rural society. Family functions not only as a vital support mechanism for job access but also as a significant conduit for patriarchal control and intra-group power dynamics, shaping access to labour opportunities along gendered and social lines.

One of the core elements explored is the use of personalised recruitment mechanisms through family involvement. Family members often act as intermediaries to facilitate employment, but they do so within a framework of patriarchal expectations that prioritise the labour needs and ambitions of sons over daughters. This structure allows families to extend their influence and consolidate their socio-political standing by supporting male family members as visible representatives in labour markets. Yet, this prioritisation of male employment rests on a foundation of symbolic violence—where cultural beliefs associate women with domesticity and motherhood and position men as providers. This categorisation limits the support women receive in pursuing external employment, reinforcing their association with unpaid, reproductive work at home. In this sense, symbolic violence becomes everyday, as in the case of ‘not-work’ in Chapter 5, and structural, systematically obstructing women’s job opportunities, reducing their earning potential, and limiting their economic agency. This nuanced analysis of family as a dynamic institution reveals that family structures in rural Kordofan are highly fluid, often contested, and sometimes repressive, operating in ways that Sen’s (1987) cooperative conflict model does not fully capture, particularly in the silencing of women’s voices in the name of familial ‘cooperation’.

Beyond family, the chapter explored the broader role of societal control, focusing on how the state uses job access as a tool for consolidating power and reinforcing ideological objectives. This strategy, particularly when combined with Islamist policies in the region, operates by selectively favouring those from the ‘NCP family’ or similar political networks aligned with Kezan values. The state prioritises candidates from these loyal groups, assuming that their social and ideological affiliations will support the government’s objectives. Meanwhile, applicants lower in Sudan’s social hierarchy face systematic exclusion, regardless of their qualifications. This process highlights how access to state employment is not only a function of individual merit but also one of social membership and *wasta* (influential connections), which intersect with ethnic, class, and labour histories to

determine job access. Here, the continuity with earlier state tactics, such as Abboud's post-independence repression of Southerners, becomes evident. However, the state's control over employment is increasingly challenged by the decentralisation and personalisation within Kezan networks, where individual agents wield significant power, adding layers of complexity that weaken the state's ability to maintain absolute control over employment access as a tool of political repression.

Further, this chapter addressed the role of citizenship in shaping access to wage labour markets. Moving beyond a legalistic perspective, the analysis demonstrated that access to wage work is stratified across gendered, ethnic, and socio-political lines, and deeply informed by historical legacies, including slavery, agriculture, pastoralism, and forced sedentarisation. These legacies persist in how wage labour is structured and accessed, with specific sectors dominated by certain ethnic groups due to historical and economic factors. Paradoxically, in some cases, individuals secure employment precisely due to their lack of socio-political affiliations, rendering them more exploitable and, therefore, more attractive to employers seeking low-cost, compliant labour. This dynamic reveals that employers often capitalise on workers' vulnerabilities, maximising control and minimising costs, in effect maintaining unequal labour relations within the labour market.

Comparing the precarious realities of wage labourers with those experiencing temporary unemployment challenges prevailing assumptions that the unemployed are necessarily the poorest. Findings showed that some unemployed individuals sustained socio-economically sufficient lives supported by family resources or savings, while wage labourers often endured more severe financial hardship, struggling to meet daily needs. This insight critiques international intervention strategies that often target unemployed populations, equating unemployment with poverty. Such approaches risk excluding those truly in need—wage labourers already working under challenging conditions without financial respite or family support.

This chapter also examined how elites—whether Northern Riverain individuals who attended elite schools in Kordofan or sons of tribal chiefs—leveraged personal and family networks, often rooted in Islamist affiliations, to bypass formal selection processes and gain privileged access to state jobs and employment resources. These elites also served in local militias as youth fighters under the Sudanese government, challenging rational choice

theory's premise on violence (Becker 1968)—that employment, and the resulting income increase, would raise the opportunity cost of engaging in violence. For these elites, social membership overrode economic deterrents, suggesting that affiliations and status, not just financial incentives, motivated their involvement in fighting. This contrasts sharply with the experience of Nuba SPLM soldiers, whose membership of the rebel forces was not voluntary but forced through abduction and who fought without pay, demonstrating that poverty does not necessarily translate into voluntary engagement in violence.

Viewing access to work through the lens of categorical violence reveals how rural labour regimes in Kordofan sustain and perpetuate entrenched inequalities. These regimes reinforce categorical pairings (Tilly 1999) between social memberships—such as gender, race, ethnicity, and political affiliation—and specific types of employment, such as government roles, external waged work, or precarious low-paid labour. Such pairings perpetuate symbolic violence, as cultural norms shape societal roles, associating certain groups with devalued work based on perceived traits. This process translates into structural violence, systematically blocking better opportunities for some while favouring others. This inequality, rooted in historical exploitation of darker-skinned people, has evolved in form but not in essence. While older systems of slavery and bonded labour have been replaced by precarious and low-paid employment, the categorical pairings between social identities and labour roles persist, ensuring that social hierarchies and labour-based disparities continue to be reproduced through the dynamics of labour regimes.

Family, as the primary social institution in rural Kordofan, paradoxically serves as both a provider of livelihoods and a vehicle for sustaining and normalising these inequalities. By framing employment access as a matter of familial love, loyalty, and protection, families obscure the violence and inequity embedded in these labour regimes, making the categorical exclusions and hierarchies within labour markets appear natural and acceptable. Thus, violence within labour regimes remains hidden under the visible guise of family unity and cultural loyalty, rendering these inequalities both socially legitimised and persistently invisible. Through this lens, rural labour regimes function as socio-political tools that uphold patriarchal control and systemic violence, shaping the economic and social realities of varied social groups within Kordofan's labour regimes.

Chapter 7 Jobs for Peace?: Institutional Dynamics, Data Poverty, and Failed Employment Generation in North Kordofan

7.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the institutional frameworks and practices around labour and employment at the policy level in Sudan, revealing how these structures are deeply embedded within broader historical and socio-political dynamics. The analysis foregrounds how labour and employment initiatives within Sudan's peacebuilding efforts intersect with established power hierarchies, affecting marginalised rural communities. By investigating how classifications and categories used in these interventions reinforce inequality, this chapter explores how concepts like categorical violence shape institutional actions, wherein rigid definitions, assumptions, and partnerships limit the agency of Sudanese workers and obscure their lived realities.

To unpack these dynamics, the chapter is organised into four sections: (1) the collection and analysis of labour data; (2) the logics and assumptions underpinning vocational training for employment generation (VT/EG) projects; (3) the institutional relationships between development agencies and governmental partners; and (4) the processes driving target selection within these projects. Together, these analyses illustrate how peacebuilding interventions, by adhering to a narrow range of theoretical frameworks and relying on classification systems shaped by powerful actors (Foucault 1973), obscure local realities and contribute to a cycle of symbolic and structural violence that perpetuates exclusion, inequality, and marginalisation within Sudan's labour regimes.

This chapter builds on the previous analyses of the historical understanding of Sudanese labour, social changes, and violence (Chapter 4); classification and social meanings of everyday work (Chapter 5); and job access through family, state, and citizenship (Chapter 6). It situates the discussion at the policy and project level, critiquing how inequality and marginalisation deepen along categorical lines through Tilly's (1999) stages of inequality-making: opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. The analysis connects the Sudan Labour Force Survey (SLFS) and VT/EG projects as mechanisms that uncritically sustain and

regenerate existing inequalities, demonstrating how international development agencies, constrained by narrow theoretical frameworks, impose fixed classifications of labour that obscure Sudan's nuanced socio-political realities. These imposed frameworks, instead of advancing peacebuilding or economic stability, effectively distort project outcomes and reinforce inequality.

This chapter critiques VT/EG-focused peacebuilding initiatives, highlighting how policy actors' preference for standardised frameworks over local complexities fosters 'institutional blindness' (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004). Adhering to standardised labour classifications, even while recognising data collection shortcomings, reinforces the notion that Sudan's rural areas are inherently plagued by poverty, unemployment, and vulnerable employment. This narrow perspective positions youth and women as the most unemployed, framing skills deficits as their primary employment barrier. This approach supports policies that rely solely on training as a solution, deepening labour data poverty (Oya 2013) while ignoring the structural inequalities present in Sudan's rural labour landscape.

Furthermore, development actors' partnerships with Sudanese state institutions involved in violence against marginalised groups underscore a lack of critical reflexivity or of an understanding of their positionality within Sudan's socio-political terrain (Mwambari 2019). This uncritical stance categorises unemployed youth as predisposed to violence, embedding symbolic violence within project design and data analysis. By relying on a narrowly defined 'theory of change'—drawing selectively on human capital and rational choice theories and a misapplied Say's Law—these initiatives frame unemployment as a skills deficit and a driver of violence, disregarding demand-side limitations and the entrenched socio-political inequalities in Sudan's labour regimes. Coupled with Sudan's conflict-affected labour dynamics, these approaches reinforce, rather than dismantle, unequal power structures.

This chapter extends the continuum (Bourgois 2004) of categorical violence to reveal how project target selection and implementation practices often reinforce existing local hierarchies, favouring individuals with ties to Khartoum-based elites and the NCP. This bias compromises the inclusivity and impact of VT/EG programmes, systematically excluding the socio-politically vulnerable, particularly those in peripheral areas. By examining these dynamics through the framework of power and knowledge production (Foucault 1973) and categorical violence, this chapter emphasises that, rather than dismantling inequalities,

development initiatives often bolster symbolic and structural hierarchies within Sudanese society, ultimately undermining the intended goals of peacebuilding efforts.

7.2 Poor Data, Inaccurate Analysis: The Social in Surveys

Despite some nuanced approaches from international labour institutions on the employment-peacebuilding nexus since the late 2010s, policymakers have continued to overlook the data gaps on employment and poverty in post-conflict contexts (Holmes et al. 2013). Official data and survey practices in Africa often fail to reflect rural labour regimes accurately, disregarding their unique features (Cramer et al. 2008). Oya (2013:256) critiques conventional labour statistics for using simplified labour questions in household surveys, which prioritise indicators such as consumption and welfare over detailed employment data, and face challenges in defining ‘household’. These issues are evident in Sudan’s labour surveys, creating a “poverty of (rural) labour statistics” (ibid.). Distortions in understanding Sudan’s economy—driven by unreliable data and analyses (Mahmoud 1984)—have characterised Sudanese labour markets as largely agricultural, informal, with high unemployment and limited training (MoHRDL 2014), justifying interventions grounded in the specific application of versions of human capital theory, rational choice theory, and macroeconomic theory.

In Sudan, research rarely scrutinises labour data quality. Most studies on Sudan’s labour market (El-Bagir and Dey 1984; Mohammed 2017; Mustafa 1976; Nour 2014) rely uncritically on large-scale national surveys. This section moves the focus to the ‘human’ side of data collection, analysing the 2011 SLFS process—from pre-survey training to data collection and analysis—while examining social dynamics across regions (e.g., Khartoum/centre to El-Obeid/periphery to El-Rahad villages), viewing these processes as power dynamics (Foucault 1973). It argues that the same hierarchies shaping work’s meaning and labour market access and categorical violence also influence SLFS institutional dynamics, marked by grievances, mistrust, and misunderstandings that compromise data quality. Consequently, labour statistics remain inadequate and unreliable.

7.2.1 Implementation of Labour Surveys in Sudan

Several national surveys have been conducted since 1990.¹⁰⁸ However, recent studies specifically addressing labour issues have been sparse since the 2011 SLFS. The latest survey, the Sudan National Household Budget and Poverty Survey (NHBPS) of 2014-2015, remains inaccessible to the public, reinforcing the SLFS as the primary source of labour data in Sudan. Although a new SLFS was planned for April 2019, it has yet to take place as of September 2023, leaving the 2011 SLFS as the most recent available survey.¹⁰⁹

7.2.1.1 Pre-Survey Training

Various unresolved issues surfaced among stakeholders during the pre-survey training and the survey itself. Participants from North Kordofan, for instance, received their invitations just three days before the training, reflecting a lack of consideration from Khartoum for state colleagues. One supervisor expressed frustration, stating, “Without an official letter, we cannot begin preparing for our training in Khartoum. [Khartoum] knows this, and yet, they never respect our situation”.¹¹⁰

Training took place in Khartoum, where twenty enumerators and four supervisors from each of Sudan’s eighteen states were trained by eighteen principal trainers. The supervisors and enumerators, mostly government officials from state-level Statistics or Labour Offices, included both NCP political appointees and qualified technocrats. Although some political appointees lacked relevant experience, they were still selected as supervisors, with some even opting to skip certain training modules.¹¹¹

The three-day training covered essential survey procedures, such as questionnaire completion and random household selection. However, significant time was also spent discussing logistics, including travel allowances and fuel costs for state-provided vehicles. For non-Khartoum-based enumerators, like those from El-Obeid with monthly salaries of 2,000 SDG (33 USD) without NCP incentives, ensuring fair compensation was crucial. Many

¹⁰⁸ The most recent national surveys include the Labour Force and Migration Surveys in 1990 and 1996, the Population Census in 2008, the National Baseline Household Survey of 2009, the SLFS in 2011 and Sudan National Household Budget and Poverty Surveys (NHBPS) in 2014 and 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, Hiba, 19/3/2019.

¹¹⁰ Interview, Nagi, 24/4/2019.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

felt that their Khartoum-based Kezan colleagues, often socio-economically privileged and receiving NCP incentives, earned higher salaries despite minimal involvement in survey activities.¹¹²

7.2.1.2 Survey Implementation: North Kordofan

The four survey teams visited seven localities in North Kordofan.¹¹³ El-Rahad, not yet established as a separate locality, was included as one of the rural centres within Um Rwaba locality. The Geographic Information System (GIS) team in the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) deliberately excluded ‘conflict areas’, resulting in these areas being unrepresented in the survey. Each team comprised one supervisor from the Statistics Office and five enumerators—one from the Labour Office and the rest from the Statistics Office—all based in the state capital, El-Obeid. The survey duration ranged from five to seven days, depending on the team. Table 11 provides an overview of the El-Nahoed team’s typical first-day schedule.¹¹⁴

Table 11. Typical ‘First Day’ of the Sudan Labour Force Survey (El-Nahoed Team)

Time	Activity
07:00	Meet and leave El-Obeid
10:00	Arrive in Nahoed. Meeting with Administrator and leaders in Nahoed and Abu Zabad
	Meeting with locality leaders to explain about SLFS
	Breakfast
12:00 - 14:30	Survey at Abu Snoul, 15 minutes from El-Nahoed
14:30 - 17:00	Survey at another village
Evening	Hotel or Sheikh's house

On the first day, the SLFS team briefed government and locality leaders in El-Nahoed and nearby areas, followed by breakfast and travel to a village 15 minutes away. They used a numerical interval method to select households, ensuring equitable distribution, explaining

¹¹² Interview, Motwakil, 10/9/2019.

¹¹³ These localities included Nahoued, Umm Rwaba, Bara, Soderi, Om Dam, Haj Ahmed, and Sheikan (El-Obeid).

¹¹⁴ As of January 2023, El-Nahoed is a locality capital in West, rather than North, Kordofan.

that “household selection is statistically fair”.¹¹⁵ As of 2019, most Sudanese enumerators followed the ‘household dwelling’ concept, which defines a household as a physical living arrangement or shared residence. In contrast, the ‘housekeeping’ concept—less familiar to these enumerators—defines a household based on contributions to a common budget or shared economic resources.

After household selection, each team of five interviewed eight families in approximately 2.5 hours—1.8 families per enumerator.¹¹⁶ According to one enumerator, each interview took 30 to 50 minutes for the 138-question survey.¹¹⁷ With North Kordofan’s average household size at 7.2 persons (MoHRDL 2014), the brief time spent per household indicates a rushed approach, with labour-related questions requiring responses from each working-age member. Enumerators justified this by stating they were trained to complete the forms swiftly.¹¹⁸

From my fieldwork in North Kordofan, I found that rushing the initial steps—rapport-building, introducing the survey, and obtaining informed consent—can compromise data quality. While experienced Sudanese enumerators may establish rapport faster than a foreign researcher, the sensitive relationship between Khartoum and rural residents requires careful handling. Rushing the process may leave interviewees with the impression that enumerators are focused solely on rapid data extraction.

7.2.2 Data Collection as a Reflection of Power Dynamics

Building on the previous section’s examination of the SLFS implementation and its impact on data reliability, this section explores the social and labour relations among key stakeholders involved in the SLFS. Specifically, it examines the dynamics between rural residents and enumerators; enumerators, Kordofan NCP managers, and Khartoum technocrats; and, Khartoum technocrats and international donors. By analysing these relationships across different regions and institutional levels, this section assesses how Sudan’s social hierarchy,

¹¹⁵ Interview, Motwakil, 10/9/2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview, Nagi, 24/4/2019.

¹¹⁷ Interview, Motwakil, 10/9/2019.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Nagi, 24/4/2019.

discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, shapes data collection, analysis, and follow-up processes within the SLFS.

7.2.2.1 Rural Residents' Perception of Enumerators as 'Agents of Evil'

Throughout Sudan's history, from the Funj dynasty to the Ottoman Egyptian periods, data collection has been used by authorities to gauge labour activities and impose maximum taxation (Daly 2004; Hill 1959). This legacy has led rural residents to habitually underreport their earnings to avoid excessive taxation. Even with local enumerators, mistrust persists, especially among nomadic communities, who often underreport livestock to reduce their tax burdens.¹¹⁹

Rural residents' distrust of officials, particularly from northern Sudan, is exacerbated by historical discriminatory attitudes. For example, Galal, a Shaigi tax collector from Khartoum, openly expressed prejudices against Darfuris, emphasising that they "have too many children" who "do not grow up properly".¹²⁰ Despite his own criticisms of the Sudan Tax Collection Authority's corruption, Galal demonstrated no hesitation in perpetuating discriminatory attitudes against western Sudanese, reinforcing Kezan attitudes that were criticised during the Sudanese Revolution. North Kordofan residents are sensitive to such biases, especially when displayed by Northern Riverain officials, and this diminishes their willingness to disclose information—even to Kordofan-based enumerators who avoid such attitudes.

Discrimination from Khartoum is not the only strain on the relationship between North Kordofani nomads and the government. The mismanagement of famines in the 1980s and 1990s led to severe livestock losses, deepening nomadic communities' mistrust of government representatives. This sentiment persists, with nomads expressing that "they

¹¹⁹ Interview, Ekram, 12/9/2019.

¹²⁰ Interview, Galal, 15/3/2019.

have nothing to share with [enumerators] as [the government] does not care about them".¹²¹

The absence of feedback from past surveys also contributes to rural residents' hesitation to share information. Kordofan-based enumerators like Ekram and Motwakil noted this reluctance and understand it as rooted in frustration over the lack of response from Khartoum.¹²² Ekram reported that villagers, despite requesting feedback, receive none, while Motwakil expressed disappointment in having to inform residents that he too receives no analysis or feedback from Khartoum. These interactions position Kordofan-based enumerators as intermediaries, often misaligned with the central government's approach.

7.2.2.2 Lack of Trust and Unequal Opportunities: Khartoum-North Kordofan Labour Relations

Despite the requirement for all government employees, including North Kordofan enumerators, to adhere to the Islamist policies of the Kezan government, Sudan's social hierarchy continues to affect relations among civil servants, especially between the periphery and centre. North Kordofan enumerators from local tribes face substantial challenges in accessing and retaining government roles, as they are often ranked lower in the social hierarchy compared to their Khartoum-based colleagues with Northern Riverain backgrounds. Motwakil, a qualified Kordofan enumerator, noted that senior managers in the Statistics and Labour Offices often secured their roles through NCP membership, lacking technical and managerial expertise.¹²³ When local issues arose, these managers lacked the ability or motivation to address them and rarely communicated with Khartoum, discouraging enumerators from raising inquiries or sharing insights from the survey.

Even when North Kordofan's enumerators raised inquiries, feedback from Khartoum has historically been limited. Since the 2011 SLFS, North Kordofan enumerators repeatedly

¹²¹ Interview, Nasr, 16/2/2019. Not all nomadic groups in Kordofan have aligned themselves with the Kezan government. While some Baggara groups, such as the Messiria, have previously collaborated closely with Khartoum, serving as slave hunters and local militias, they are well aware of being used as convenient proxies.

¹²² Interview, Ekram, 10/9/2019.

¹²³ Interview, Motwakil, 10/9/2019.

requested analysis from Khartoum without response; yet I was able to obtain an English translation from the Ministry of Human Resources Development and Labour (MoHRDL), which was also available on the ILO website. The lack of communication is partly attributed to the Khartoum technocrats' dismissive attitudes towards their state colleagues, viewing North Kordofan as a "burden" (de Waal 2015:73) and perceiving state-based colleagues as hindrances to Sudan's development.

North Kordofan enumerators are acutely aware of this discrimination, which diminishes their sense of value and contribution. This atmosphere of mistrust shapes relations between Khartoum and North Kordofan, directly impacting the extent to which local enumerators share survey findings. Ekram, an enumerator, expressed his frustration:

[Khartoum-based technocrats are] all Kezan who are like a gang...they do not understand the local situation, so we just follow their instructions. We know that actually more children are working. Nomads have more animals than they declare, but we just don't include those grey area things because Khartoum does not tell us what to do. They themselves do not know how to deal with these realities. At the locality level, we have to know the technicalities but it does not get us anywhere.

When survey methods fail to capture the local context, enumerators often rely on assumptions. Aware of Sudan's international image as a 'failed state' plagued by conflict and poverty, and conscious of Khartoum's condescension toward North Kordofan, some enumerators choose not to correct ambiguities, reporting only the data declared, even if they suspect inaccuracies.

The centre-periphery hierarchy is also evident in training opportunities, which disproportionately favour Khartoum. North Kordofani enumerators frequently voiced their frustration, stating that "training opportunities always go to Khartoum".¹²⁴ While they receive some training—often in Gulf countries—state-based staff are rarely offered the chance to train in Europe, unlike their Khartoum colleagues. Ekram, for instance, attended training in a Gulf country, unaware that his Khartoum counterparts were trained in Scandinavia, which he viewed as a superior opportunity. Despite state-based enumerators being responsible for conducting surveys on the ground, there is "no way for state people to

¹²⁴ Interview, Ekram, 10/9/2019.

get training in Europe”.¹²⁵ The NCP’s nepotistic recruitment practices and the lack of managerial expertise among its appointees further hinder effective communication and knowledge sharing between North Kordofan and Khartoum.

7.2.2.3 Donor Involvement in Keeping the Data Scarce and Securitization of Data

The reliability of Sudan’s labour data is shaped not only by internal dynamics but also by international donors whose financial influence and limited understanding of Sudanese labour markets further strain data collection efforts. The exclusive availability of the SLFS analysis in English suggests partial funding by donors unfamiliar with Arabic; the Director of Labour Statistics at the MoHRDL confirmed that an ILO expert from the United States was involved in the study.¹²⁶ Khartoum may have lacked the motivation or resources to produce Arabic findings, not only for its state colleagues but also for internal use. If committed to enhancing Sudan’s labour institutions, the ILO could have organised post-survey information-sharing sessions in Khartoum and at the state level—particularly crucial in Sudan, where data has historically been securitised as an intelligence resource (Sikainga 1996). Unfortunately, like Khartoum’s lack of support for enumerators, the ILO mirrored this gap, limiting post-survey information dissemination after receiving the English report from the CBS.

Externally funded projects, such as the SLFS, have mixed implications for data quality. While donor financial support can be beneficial, rigid deadlines, inflexible schedules, and poor coordination with government bodies can hinder data quality. Donors often prioritise their own schedules, straining limited resources within labour institutions and disrupting standard operations, ultimately compromising efficiency.

International donors’ standardised definitions of labour also influence Sudanese policymakers. When asked about labour definitions, a senior CBS manager, irritated, replied, “we use the ILO definition for our surveys. What more can I help you with?”¹²⁷ He added that, “regardless of the reality of Sudan”, the CBS adheres to the ISEC Standard Classification

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Interview, Ustaza Thoraya Farah, Director of Labour Statistics, MoHRDL, 19/3/2019.

¹²⁷ Interview, Director of Population and Social Studies, CBS, 3/7/2019.

“all other countries are using”, citing his involvement in a UNICEF study to assert the international validity of his approach. When asked about the challenges facing labour research in Sudan, he attributed issues solely to funding limitations: “the only problem is money. With a constraint on money, we cannot go to many places”, implying that increasing research locations alone would resolve the challenges of labour research.

This response reveals an acceptance of international standards while overlooking their limitations in Sudan’s context, suggesting Khartoum may feel powerless—or be uninterested—in addressing these limitations. While internationally standardised labour definitions allow governments to compare national data globally, this alignment often means that developing countries, such as Sudan, standardise their labour data to fit global norms, often disregarding unique national contexts.

7.2.3 Data Analysis: Reality vs. Descriptive Statistics

The institutional dynamics surrounding data collection, coupled with data inaccuracies and an uncritical reliance on international labour classifications, significantly affect the analysis of SLFS data. A lack of familiarity and a tendency to categorise rural labour simplistically reflect Khartoum-based technocrats’ biased understanding, a form of symbolic violence that further perpetuates data insufficiencies, normalising gaps in rural labour data.

Predominantly from Northern or Central Riverain ethnic groups and having spent most of their lives in Khartoum, some technocrats admit limited knowledge of rural labour dynamics and defer such matters to traditional leaders.¹²⁸

Although aware that international labour classifications do not accurately reflect rural labour realities,¹²⁹ these technocrats continue to apply them uncritically, revealing an apparent lack of interest in the complexities of rural labour. This reliance on oversimplified classifications and the technocrats’ limited engagement with rural issues raise concerns about the adequacy of existing data settings for meaningful rural labour analysis, thereby contributing to the ‘data poverty’ that continues to define rural labour statistics (Oya 2013). To explore how these institutional dynamics lead to data analyses that diverge from rural

¹²⁸ Interview, Director of Planning, MoLHRD, 19/3/2019; Director of Policy, MoLHRD, 26/3/2019.

¹²⁹ Interview, Director of Population and Social Studies, CBS, 3/7/2019.

labour realities, this section examines four key discrepancies between the SLFS analyses and this study's findings: household structures, job-seeking methods, seasonality and diversity in labour markets, and the relationship between employment and educational attainment.

7.2.3.1 Households as Fluid Social Entities

Following the official labour research approaches, the SLFS and other recent surveys in Sudan predominantly treat the household as a physical living arrangement, using it as the primary unit of analysis. In discussions with Professor Kabbashi, an economist and SLFS Methodology Committee member at the University of Khartoum, when I told him that I was researching labour in El-Rahad, he assumed I was conducting a household-based survey and advised me to interview 29 households in the rural town, based on an estimated population of 4,000. He suggested this would “ensure unbiased research and statistically robust results”.¹³⁰ However, selecting 29 households based solely on equal physical intervals (Section 7.2.1) prioritises location over social characteristics, treating the household as an isolated, unified entity led by a ‘household head’. This perspective overlooks inter-household dynamics and assumes a uniform leadership, although who the ‘household head’ is often varies depending on who is asked.

Rural Sudanese households exhibit particularly fluid social structures. In El-Rahad, as discussed in Section 3.3.3, houses demonstrate interconnected social dynamics distinct from urban settings. Neighbours often stay in each other's homes, share keys, and engage in shared meals and sleeping arrangements as if they belong to the household, even when maintaining separate residences. Many families I spoke with even included members living elsewhere within their concept of a ‘household’, reflecting the active role of distant relatives in supporting younger family members, particularly in job-seeking (Section 6.2.1.2).

This fluidity also extends to the physical layout of households. In El-Rahad, nearby villages, and parts of El-Obeid, houses frequently have gates or connecting doors that link them to neighbouring homes, facilitating daily exchanges of goods and labour. These interconnected spaces resemble different rooms within a single, larger house, underscoring the need for

¹³⁰ Interview, Professor Kabbashi, University of Khartoum, 22/5/2019.

more nuanced analyses of household relations. However, enumerators are not instructed to examine these dynamics, as they fall outside international household definitions. Moreover, the hierarchy between Khartoum-based analysts and state-level enumerators discourages enumerators from raising these complexities,¹³¹ limiting the scope of data collection and reinforcing a narrow interpretation of household structures.

7.2.3.2 Job-Seeking Methods

In Sudan's rural labour markets and regimes, job opportunities are limited and shaped by various historical and socio-political factors (Chapter 6). The SLFS survey data indicated that of the six available job-seeking methods, 'relatives' was the most commonly used, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, urban areas showed a greater tendency towards using the 'Labour Office'. Interestingly, the report noted minimal gender differences in the preference for the 'relatives' method (MoHRDL 2014:118), yet it presented these findings without contextual analysis or explanation.

My own study yielded similar quantitative results, with a higher incidence of participants selecting the 'Labour Office' option in urban settings. To interpret these results, I explored factors such as job types, educational backgrounds, job-seeking journey dynamics, and limited immediate social connections in urban areas. The SLFS analysis would have benefited greatly if enumerators had asked participants why they chose 'Labour Office' or 'relatives' and shared these insights with analysts in Khartoum. Such details could have added depth to the analysis, particularly around gendered preferences for 'relatives', which the report leaves unexplored.

Including these explanations would have streamlined and enriched the analysis. However, constraints such as limited funding and complex social and institutional dynamics between Khartoum-based technocrats, enumerators, and rural participants did not encourage enumerators to gather this additional data.¹³² These challenges underscore the need for

¹³¹ Interview, Ekram, 10/9/2019.

¹³² Ibid.

trust and clear communication among all stakeholders in labour research to produce a more comprehensive and insightful analysis.

7.2.3.3 Seasonality and Diversity in Labour Markets

Large-scale labour surveys, such as the SLFS, capture a snapshot of work activity during a narrow timeframe, such as the seven days prior to the interview. This approach counts any work—whether for pay, profit, or family gain, including farming—that occurs within that week, but excludes activity at other times of the year. Consequently, the seasonality structuring rural labour markets is difficult to capture under these survey conditions. This research has highlighted not only the importance of seasonality but also its diversity in shaping labour relations in El-Rahad, particularly through wage labour markets (Section 6.4.2). Beyond a simple ‘rainy season’ and ‘dry season’ binary, seasonality shapes work patterns across agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, influencing family work strategies.

When asked about seasonality’s impact on rural work, the survey director noted that the participation rate of rural village women was only 70% due to work commitments¹³³—a single measure within a broader understanding of ‘labour’ in rural areas. The SLFS report’s treatment of seasonality is minimal, noting only that seasonal workers—comprising 32.8% of the workforce—were largely unaccounted for, with questions about work location and sector achieving only a 15% response rate. Consequently, these statistics were deemed “not representative enough to be used” (MoHRDL 2014:55).

The survey’s static view of rural labour markets also overlooks wage work’s role in rural livelihoods. The SLFS found waged and salaried work concentrated in urbanised and industrialised states, such as Khartoum (62.4%) and Red Sea (54.1%), with lower rates in regions like West Darfur (14.8%), South Darfur (16.4%), and North Kordofan (19.6%). While salaried work typically spans the year, wage work is often highly seasonal, as discussed by Ali and O’Brien (1984) in North Kordofan. My research in rural El-Rahad found a wide range of seasonal wage work as a primary livelihood source. Nearly all women involved in social reproductive labour also engaged in seasonal wage work, and self-employed farmers took

¹³³ Interview, Director of Population and Social Studies, CBS, 03/07/2019.

up wage work depending on the season (Section 6.4.2.2). If the SLFS were able to capture secondary or tertiary forms of work, rather than focusing solely on primary employment, the reported rates of waged and salaried work would likely be higher. Accurately gathering data on these secondary and tertiary activities requires detailed, year-round time-use inquiries, which the limited time SLFS teams spent with each household could not accommodate (Section 7.2.1.2). Given the seasonal nature of wage work, the current survey setup may therefore fail to capture the full complexity of people's livelihoods.

7.2.3.4 Un/Employment, Education and Rurality

Data and personal accounts reveal that employment status in Sudan varies throughout the year and is shaped by social norms regarding what constitutes work (Section 5.2). Access to employment is influenced by multiple factors, including jobseekers' social networks and perceived social membership. Higher education does not automatically translate to employability, and individuals with more schooling often still struggle to find jobs. No single model or theory fully explains why some people are employed while others are not, or accounts for the varying employment vulnerabilities. Nonetheless, human capital theory—asserting that higher education leads to employment or 'better' jobs—remains influential, and analysts in Khartoum continue to uncritically apply its logic, focusing on supply-side deficiencies as the primary cause of unemployment. This reflects the very misapplication of Say's Law and what Amsden (2010) critiques as 'job dementia', despite data revealing patterns that challenge these assumptions.

In its analysis of vulnerable employment, the SLFS argues that own-account and family workers are categorically 'vulnerable' due to limited formal work arrangements and benefits, which supposedly make them more susceptible to economic shocks (MoHRDL 2014:80). The report notes that youth (ages 15–24) and rural workers have especially high rates of 'vulnerable' employment, with North Kordofan (72.2%) ranking third highest after South Darfur (74.0%) and South Kordofan (72.6%) (MoHRDL 2014:80–81). Furthermore, the SLFS makes a generalised link between vulnerable employment and lower educational attainment, stating that "in terms of educational attainment, those with lower levels of education were more likely to be in vulnerable employment" (MoHRDL 2014:81). Even more

so than factors such as sex, rurality, and age, educational attainment consistently shapes SLFS analyses of employment vulnerability in Sudan.

However, my research in El-Rahad challenges this assumption. Youths categorised as contributing family workers did not view their employment as vulnerable. For instance, Saadullah, a seventeen-year-old boat operator with only primary schooling, exhibited a degree of autonomy and control over his work that surpassed that of some more educated individuals.¹³⁴ Many family workers I encountered had significant decision-making power, robust social networks, flexible labour options, and substantial income, all of which contest the automatic classification of rural own-account and family workers as ‘vulnerable’. These accounts highlight the diversity within labour experiences, suggesting that educational attainment alone does not determine vulnerability in employment.

A similar complexity exists in analysing the unemployed. The SLFS report emphasises educational attainment among the unemployed, noting that ‘less than primary’ education is the largest group (30.6%) among the unemployed, with 46.3% residing in rural areas (MoHRDL 2014:109). The report also highlights higher unemployment rates among women and youth. Notably, unemployment rates increase with educational level, reaching 38.8% among those with tertiary education compared to 11.7% among those with less than primary schooling (MoHRDL 2014:108). These conflicting findings suggest that Sudan’s high graduate unemployment rate is linked to the country’s history of rapid educational expansion without parallel job creation (Section 4.5.2). However, instead of exploring this further, Sudanese policymakers often reference similar trends in other Arab countries,¹³⁵ simply concluding that “this finding is not surprising” due to similar trends in other Arab states (MoHRDL 2014:108). While acknowledging that a shared trend may be informative, it does not fully explain Sudan’s specific labour market dynamics. Sudan’s identity, after all, is both Arab and African, and unique regional contexts shape its labour realities.

The SLFS dedicates substantial space—over 3,000 words—to analysing supply-side factors such as education, location, and gender among the unemployed, and just 550 to the duration of and reasons for unemployment. The vast majority (87.5%) of respondents cited

¹³⁴ Interview, Saadullah, 26/8/2019.

¹³⁵ Interview, Director of Policy, MoHRDL, 30/06/2019.

‘no jobs’ as the primary reason for unemployment, with substantially fewer mentions of ‘inappropriate wage’ (2.6%) and ‘inconvenient work’ (2.6%) (MoHRDL 2014:114). Following this, the report shifts the focus to the training profile of the unemployed, noting that 66.1% had received ‘no forms of training’.

Despite data clearly indicating a labour demand issue as the primary reason for unemployment, the analysis structure, which highlights the lack of training among the unemployed as a problem, reveals an unrecognised bias among the analysts. Although the data also shows high unemployment rates among those with educational attainment, the report’s framing suggests an implicit acceptance of human capital theory, frequently associating unemployment with a supposed lack of training rather than recognising broader labour demand constraints.

This focus reflects the perspectives of the analysts and policymakers behind the report, highlighting how classification and knowledge-making can be political (Foucault 1973). The report’s prioritisation of supply-side factors over demand-side issues, such as job availability, mirrors Amsden’s (2010) critique of overemphasising supply-side causes of unemployment (Section 2.4). Despite identifying ‘lack of jobs’ as a major reason for unemployment, the report quickly moves on to discuss training attainment, implying that training could mitigate unemployment. The way the analysis also categorically associated rural areas with vulnerable employment and unemployment also assumes that it is the lack of training in the rural areas that causes vulnerable employment and unemployment. As will be further discussed, this assumption that unemployment stems primarily from a lack of training is common among both Sudanese and international policymakers and is reflected in international and national interventions that use vocational training as a strategy for employment generation (Section 2.2). This perspective contributes to an oversimplified narrative that overlooks critical demand-side issues, such as the structural shortage of jobs in Sudan’s labour markets, and places undue emphasis on supply-side factors, effectively attributing unemployment and vulnerable employment to individuals’ own (lack of) skills and human capital deficits.

Based on these analytical issues in the SLFS data, several assumptions about rural labour emerge, revealing significant gaps. First, there is a neglect of seasonality and the multiplicity of work in rural areas, with surveys like the SLFS capturing only primary employment and

failing to account for seasonal and secondary activities that are essential to rural labour. Second, the analysis lacks consideration of the social dynamics within and between households, including the vital role that extended family networks play in job-seeking, particularly in rural areas where formal job placement services are sparse. Instead, analysts assume that supply-side interventions, such as training, will address unemployment and vulnerable employment, categorically attributing labour market issues to skill deficiencies. This perspective oversimplifies rural labour conditions by assuming that training alone will solve structural challenges in employment, thus disregarding the complexity and interdependence of rural labour practices that extend beyond individual skills to include social and seasonal factors crucial to sustaining livelihoods.

This section underscores how institutional and historical dynamics hinder accurate labour data collection in Sudan, particularly in rural areas. The historical use of labour data for taxation has fostered distrust among rural residents, leading to underreporting of assets, such as livestock and income, to avoid punitive measures. This distrust is further compounded by the disconnect between Khartoum-based technocrats and local enumerators in regions like Kordofan, where a lack of communication and feedback erodes trust, making participants reluctant to engage fully with enumerators. Furthermore, Khartoum technocrats view rural areas as inherently and categorically 'inferior', a perception that shapes the SLFS's methodology and often dismisses the insights of rural enumerators, thus compromising data accuracy. This hierarchical dynamic reinforces symbolic violence through categorical divisions, positioning rural Sudan as underdeveloped and ignoring the region's nuanced economic and social structures. The SLFS's rigid classifications and supply-focused analyses fail to account for critical rural labour aspects, including seasonality, secondary employment, and flexible household structures, creating an oversimplified narrative. By attributing employment challenges solely to skill deficits, these policies overlook demand-side constraints, reinforcing a narrative of rural underdevelopment that prioritises supply-focused interventions without addressing the systemic factors shaping rural unemployment.

7.3 Vocational Training for Employment Generation

Based on the labour data collected and analysed in the previous section, which reinforces widely accepted assumptions rooted in versions of human capital theory and the misapplied human capital variant of Say's Law, training is uncritically viewed as the primary solution for vulnerable employment and unemployment, particularly in rural areas. Employment generation has become a common tool in peacebuilding in developing countries affected by conflict (Brück et al. 2021; Cramer 2015). In Sudan too, donors supported employment generation through vocational training (VT/EG) projects in conflict-affected states for peacebuilding purposes (see Section 2.2). During my role as a development worker overseeing VT/EG projects for peacebuilding in Sudan from 2012–2016, I also did not question the project logics or its approach. Despite the projects' limitations, employment generation was seen as essential to preventing violence, and this assumption was seldom questioned by donor representatives or development workers. This same vocational training logic, viewed as a pathway to employment and stability, was also widely applied in other conflict-affected regions where I worked, including Afghanistan, Angola, and Northern Uganda, from 2003 onwards.

However, this logic largely disregards the social dimensions of labour market access, such as the critical roles of family and social networks in job-seeking, and instead places the responsibility for employment outcomes on labour supply factors. This emphasis not only perpetuates 'job dementia' (Amsden 2010)—an overemphasis on supply-side interventions that ignore demand-side constraints and structural issues in the labour market—but also enacts a form of symbolic violence by linking uneducated young men to a predisposition toward violence, even as evidence increasingly challenges these assumptions.

Using this narrow perspective, most development agencies partnered with Sudanese government institutions, sometimes due to institutional blindness or limited understanding, despite being aware that these institutions were complicit in perpetrating violence against marginalised communities in peripheral areas. I examine this institutional blindness (Ferguson, 1999; Mosse, 2004) through the analysis of project logics, implementation practices, and target selection processes, framing it as a form of categorical violence embedded within broader power dynamics. This perspective reveals how underlying assumptions and knowledge hierarchies sustain unequal relations among stakeholders in

VT/EG projects. By critically reflecting on my experiences (Davies, 2008), I expose shared assumptions and institutional patterns that reinforce these oversights, highlighting how VT/EG projects often lack the contextualisation required to address genuine local conditions and needs.

7.3.1 Project Logics, Assumptions and Donors' Blindness

7.3.1.1 *'Job Dementia' and Despising Vocational Training*

Labour data analysis in Sudan perpetuates the narrative that unemployment and vulnerable employment, especially in rural areas, stem from a lack of training or low educational attainment. This has reinforced the belief among donors and Sudanese elites that vocational training is critical for job creation and, by extension, peacebuilding. During my work in Sudan from 2012 to 2016, this approach was widely accepted for employment generation and peacebuilding, a view still prevalent in 2024. The most recent JICA-funded vocational training project, “The Project for Strengthening the Vocational Training System Targeting State Vocational Training Center” (known as GEMS from ‘Genuine Employable Skills’), though classified as a ‘capacity building’ project, also integrates peacebuilding goals. Japan’s country assistance policy for Sudan frames vocational training as a pathway to peacebuilding, poverty reduction, and reintegration of ex-combatants, aiming to support vulnerable groups by strengthening the vocational training system (JICA et al. 2021:3–1). This approach assumes that marginalised young men engage in violence primarily as an economic choice, driven by opportunity cost considerations. Technical consultants suggested that expecting them to enter office jobs was unrealistic; instead, training would ideally funnel them into skilled blue-collar roles. This logic was consistently reinforced across shared briefings by technical experts and international agencies, remaining largely unquestioned—a narrative entrenched in assumptions, as previously discussed in Section 2.4.

An unequal social dynamic existed between Sudanese elites, international donors, vocational trainers, and trainees, which limited understanding of vocational training among Khartoum-based programme managers (including my previous role) and Sudanese elites. Often holding advanced degrees from Western universities, these managers had little

exposure to vocational training within their own countries.¹³⁶ They tended to view vocational training as a discrete project for socio-economically disadvantaged youth, whom they saw as ‘would-be-criminals’ with limited access to higher education and thus in need of vocational skills to improve their employability. This perception of youth as having “conflict-carrying capacity” (UNDP 2017:20) fuelled the belief that workforce integration through vocational training would contribute to peacebuilding alongside economic development in conflict-affected areas.

Despite its perceived utility in assimilating disadvantaged ‘would-be-criminal’ youth into labour markets, vocational training was also seen as inferior and outdated by both expatriate programme managers and Sudanese elites.¹³⁷ This attitude has roots in Sudan’s colonial history, which shaped hierarchical views on certain professions. Skilled labour, associated with vocational training graduates, became synonymous with blue-collar work and was disregarded by elites, despite its critical economic role. Vocational training’s struggles, as noted by Jack and Taha (1977:5), were often attributed to “a lack of motivated trainees and trained instructors”, resulting in a shortage of skilled labour and impeding both supply and demand. Jack and Taha also noted that vocational training lacked political and financial backing, leaving it sidelined in national policy agendas. This led to programmes being built on flawed assumptions, implemented poorly, and often dismissed.

A persistent discrepancy exists between the skills needed by the labour market and those taught in vocational training programmes, presenting a major barrier to youth employment. Stakeholders—including the Sudanese government, academics (Mohammed 2017; Nour 2014), labour-focused international agencies (Ibrahim et al. 2014; ILO 2022; ILO and MoHRDL 2013), humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF (ILO et al. 2020), and bilateral donors like Germany (GIZ 2015a, 2015b, 2018) and Japan (JICA 2010b; JICA et al. 2014; Tajima et al. 2021)—have consistently argued that vocational training graduates lack skills aligned with market demand. Consequently, their peacebuilding programmes incorporated employment generation projects that are heavily focused on supply-side interventions. These include training courses, training of trainers (ToT), capacity building for

¹³⁶ Observation, Interview, Claudia, 15/5/2019; Michi, 23/1/2019; Ueno, 29/1/2019.

¹³⁷ Interview, Dr Komey, 11/2/2019.

training providers, curriculum development, and facility upgrades, all aimed at bridging the perceived skills gap.

While this thesis acknowledges that vocational training graduates' skills can indeed be enhanced, it challenges the core theory of change in international peacebuilding interventions that assumes that better-trained workers will automatically generate labour demand. The structural issues within Sudan's labour market are frequently overlooked, as development workers often avoid addressing these complex demand-side challenges, partly because budget limitations constrain interventions from effectively addressing them.

7.3.1.2 Treating Youth as 'Would-Be-Criminals'

The assumption rooted in rational choice theory on violence suggests that uneducated youth with limited employment prospects face a lower opportunity cost for engaging in violence. While development workers, myself included, acknowledged that grievances and horizontal inequalities (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Stewart 2001) could push youth towards armed conflict, the underlying assumption remained that these uneducated youth *would* resort to violence, whether motivated by greed or grievance. This view, which overlooks the broader social dynamics contributing to violence, was widely accepted among development workers. My interviews with colleagues involved in VT/EG for peacebuilding initiatives confirm the prevalence of this assumption.

A UNDP team experienced in VT/EG for peacebuilding in Sudan argues that poverty and conflict reinforce one another: poverty fuels conflict, and conflict, in turn, deepens poverty by damaging infrastructure, severing livelihoods, and restricting access to education.¹³⁸ This view effectively frames youth as potential risks, implying a propensity for criminality. Brinsley, a UNDP programme officer with a UK Master's degree and experience in another conflict-affected African nation, described how conflict devastates infrastructure, disrupts employment, and significantly hampers educational opportunities. He noted that, in South Kordofan, conflict peaks during the dry season due to heightened unemployment and deepened poverty, adding that the "desire for employment and financial stability is

¹³⁸ Interview, Brinsley, 28/1/2019, Michi, 23/1/2019.

universal—everyone wants to work and get money”.¹³⁹ Another UNDP veteran, an international programme manager, linked poverty and lack of job opportunities to crime, particularly drug dealing, which serves as a survival mechanism for unemployed youth, and suggested that community policing might mitigate crime and improve unemployed individuals’ livelihoods.¹⁴⁰

Similarly, Osman, a senior Sudanese official overseeing DDR efforts, emphasised employment’s role in peacebuilding. Adopting current development jargon, he asserted that “reintegration in bad places leads to criminal gangs” and described these gangs in peripheral areas as “really bad people”.¹⁴¹ According to Osman, “the key is governors. Good governors, rule of law, livelihoods, social cohesion, and basic services can transform conflict into peace”. Notably, he claimed there had been no collapse or conflict in Sudan since 2006, ignoring the realities of the Sudanese Revolution and ongoing conflicts in peripheral regions.

These comments from both international and Sudanese programme managers overseeing donor-funded peacebuilding efforts through VT/EG reveal a highly securitised approach to peacebuilding initiatives, reflecting a selective application of rational choice theory. While poverty may interact with conflict dynamics, it does not automatically push the unemployed or impoverished toward violence (Section 2.3). For instance, as shown by Munir (Section 6.2.2) and the Dongolawi government officer Fahmi—who used his Kezan connections to secure business loans and joined security forces while at Omdurman Islamic University¹⁴²—those who voluntarily join conflict forces, such as the PDF, often come from educated, upper-middle-class backgrounds within Northern Riverain ‘Arab’ groups. This aligns with Gutiérrez-Sanín and Vargas’ (2017) findings in Colombia, showing that employed elites with moderate to high incomes are also prone to actively participating in and even driving political violence.

Conflict does not universally lead to destruction: in some cases, it generates new employment opportunities (Cramer 2015; Richards 1996), as seen in Sudan with the recruitment of Islamists and Baggara as government militias, including the RSF and PDF.

¹³⁹ Interview, Brinsley, 28/1/2019.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Michi, 23/1/2019.

¹⁴¹ Interview, Osman, 27/1/2019.

¹⁴² Interview, Fahmi, 16/7/2019.

Additionally, linking the dry season with heightened poverty and conflict in rural areas lacks empirical support and challenges neo-Malthusian assumptions (Selby 2014; Verhoeven 2011). Reports from sources like the Sudan Tribune and Radio Dabanga as well as discussions with El-Rahad residents¹⁴³ counter Brinsley's claim that crime consistently rises in North Kordofan during the dry season. Although UNDP advocates community policing to address drug-related crime among youth, this approach may fall short in contexts where drug dealing serves as a livelihood for some, including government soldiers and police.

Osman's comment implies that youth unemployment is regarded as a security concern, drawing parallels with how British intelligence officers sought to control the labour of freed slaves during the colonial period (Section 4.4.3). His characterisation of certain peripheral regions as "bad places" with the potential for criminal activity reflects the continuum of violence (Bourgois 2004; Cockburn 2009) which has historically stigmatised and marginalised regions such as Darfur and Kordofan, describing them as uncivilised and in need of 'correction'. This classification has also been used by various Khartoum governments to justify slavery and violent attacks against marginalised populations in these areas (Jok 2015; Rolandsen and Daly 2016).

Furthermore, Osman's emphasis on the importance of state governors for programme success highlights his willingness to align internationally funded programmes, such as employment generation within DDR, with Kezan's policy objectives. State governors, often high-ranking Kezan officials directly nominated by El-Bashir, play a crucial role in ensuring that development policies at the state level align with Kezan objectives. It is worth noting that some of these governors, such as Haroun, have been implicated as war criminals who prioritise their own interests over the lives of their citizens due to social and political differences.

It was disconcerting to hear such discriminatory remarks from one of the key Sudanese counterparts for employment generation programmes amidst the Sudanese Revolution, just as some government officials finally began sharing their long-suppressed reservations about Kezan. It revealed the uncomfortable truth that international development workers had been working closely with Kezan hardliners who held prejudiced views about the periphery,

¹⁴³ Interview, Nasr, 16/2/2019, Hawa, 12/9/2019.

the very population that international aid was meant to support. These remarks highlighted the inherent bias and blind spots that had persisted within the international community, leading to the neglect of the voices and concerns of those marginalised communities.

7.3.1.3 Institutional Constraints: Unchanged Logic and Lessons Barely Learned

Despite mounting evidence challenging the link between training, employment, and peace, development agencies continue to view such programmes as effective peacebuilding tools, a stance highlighted by Brück et al. (2021), who identify this uncritical belief in jobs-for-peace interventions as a “major challenge for justifying continued spending”. This perspective aligns with my own experience in peacebuilding programmes, where I initially accepted these assumptions uncritically. Over time, however, I observed how institutional dynamics, along with a degree of wilful ignorance, perpetuate these beliefs. These assumptions frame youth as predisposed to violence, overlooking broader structural factors contributing to conflict.

Evidence that challenged this assumption was emerging. For instance, Sudan’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, backed by the IMF and World Bank, identifies limited job opportunities, favouritism, and political, ethnic, and tribal affiliations as core contributors to unemployment (MoFEP 2021:15). Similarly, JICA (2013b:xiii) acknowledges the limitations of employment rates as success measures in vocational training projects due to factors such as labour market conditions and personal relationships. One JICA programme manager, informed by the experience of a senior vocational trainer, also noted that VT rarely leads directly to employment.¹⁴⁴ Amid the Sudanese Revolution’s turmoil, even JICA staff began to question the relevance of employment projects in such unstable conditions. Yet, despite these insights, the prevailing ‘theory of change’ framework remains largely unaltered, and projects continue without integrating these lessons.

Institutional factors within aid agencies and donor organisations further contribute to the disconnect in addressing labour market needs. In Japan, VT/EG projects in conflict-affected countries, often classified as emergency interventions, are funded via a supplementary

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Ueno, Akita, 29/1/2019.

budget that must typically be disbursed within the fiscal year (MoFA 2017). While this emergency classification enables quick access to funds, it limits the ability to design interventions that address demand-side labour market issues comprehensively. Additionally, reports underscoring the importance of social dynamics, such as personal relationships, rarely propose actionable interventions, and programme managers often lack a nuanced understanding of complex socio-cultural factors in peripheral areas. Expat managers, in particular, struggle to integrate local social dimensions—such as ethnicity—into project design. Consultants from headquarters frequently rely on previous experience when crafting proposals rather than tailoring them to the unique labour market realities of specific countries (GIZ 2016; JICA et al. 2014). Consequently, vital social factors that shape unemployment structures are often omitted from project frameworks, resulting in an oversimplified 'logframe' approach.

Oversimplification occurs as project information is condensed into formats like the Project Design Matrix (PDM) (JICA 2004), or Project Logic Model (PLM) (USAID 2017), which provide limited scope for capturing nuanced social factors. Srinivasan (2021) highlights how peace-making efforts in Sudan, through similar simplification, have unintentionally perpetuated violence and political authoritarianism. This approach often reduces complex political realities to manageable but oversimplified issues, leading development agencies to rely heavily on rigid frameworks that overlook critical contextual factors. Although the PDM or PLM could theoretically be adjusted, these changes require navigating complex layers of institutional approval, reinforcing initial assumptions and curtailing flexibility to address evolving labour market needs (JICA 2016). Such simplifications, while helping foreign development managers conceptualise Sudan's context (Mitchell 2002), ultimately strip away the nuanced realities they aim to address, thereby undermining projects' potential to contribute to sustainable peace.

The demanding conditions faced by aid workers in conflict-affected regions compound the inherent challenges of development work. Research shows that aid workers often face high stress levels due to intense workloads and complex organisational dynamics (Young, Pakenham, and Norwood 2018). In Sudan, development workers frequently put in long hours, including evenings and weekends, to manage heavy workloads and meet frequent

requests from headquarters. In my experience, this tireless dedication is often romanticised in the field as a sign of resilience and moral commitment.

Pre-deployment health check-ups reinforce the idea that only the healthiest and most resilient workers are suited for challenging environments, instilling a sense of pride around endurance. This internalised standard often drives aid workers in conflict zones, where single or unaccompanied individuals are more common, to work extended hours. Without the structure of family life and familiar surroundings, many fill their time by immersing themselves in additional tasks to manage isolation. This operational focus, geared toward immediate project goals, limits engagement with broader contextual issues, such as Sudan's labour history, social dynamics, or labour market realities, and restricts reflection on project alignment with these factors. Programme managers, therefore, prioritise urgent administrative and logistical tasks, presuming projects are running smoothly unless concerns arise from consultants. This high-pressure environment ultimately constrains in-depth analysis and reflective assessment, widening the gap between project implementation and an understanding of local impacts.

Reflecting on my own experience, I realise that while this lack of contextual understanding could be seen as a form of 'institutional blindness' where development agencies systematically ignore the complex local realities (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004), my own limitations were not entirely intentional. The constraints of my role, compounded by my initial assumptions and limited study of Sudanese labour dynamics, deepened my own lack of awareness. This perspective underscores how, in practice, unawareness in development can emerge not only from deliberate avoidance but also from structural and situational pressures that prevent comprehensive engagement with local complexities.

To conclude this section, the persistent reliance on VT/EG as a peacebuilding tool reveals an institutionalised form of strategic ignorance within development agencies. Despite evidence that challenges the assumption that training alone addresses the complex causes of unemployment, violence, and instability, agencies continue to implement supply-side interventions grounded in selective applications of human capital, rational choice, and macroeconomic theories. This adherence to narrow frameworks disregards local historical and social complexities, rendering these factors invisible within rigid project models.

The rigid institutional structures, simplified project frameworks, and short funding cycles—products of categorical violence—further exacerbate these challenges. Such limitations prompt managers to view unemployment and labour issues as technical or economic hurdles rather than adaptive social dynamics. Heavy workloads reinforce this avoidance, discouraging meaningful engagement with Sudan's complex labour market realities and allowing interventions to bypass critical socio-political factors that drive unemployment and marginalisation. As a result, the 'peace through employment' logic remains an inflexible, oversimplified approach, which perpetuates a narrow view of Sudan's labour issues, framing Sudan as a 'failed state' and overlooking key socio-political drivers of marginalisation.

7.3.2 Institutional Dynamics of Government Vocational Institutions: Partnering with Violent Instigators?

This section investigates the institutional dynamics of government-managed vocational institutions as local project partners in donor-led peacebuilding initiatives. Previous research highlights several technical and managerial challenges—such as the lack of these capacities, insufficient finance, and efficacy (Betcherman, Olivas, and Dar 2004), high instructor turnover, poor financial management, and detached supervision during placements (Melesse, Haley, and Wärvik 2022), low-quality and insufficient training and lack of qualified teachers (Atari et al. 2010; Ibrahim et al. 2014), and inadequate equipment and a lack of proper monitoring and evaluation (JICA and KRC 2021). While these factors are relevant to this analysis, this section aims to delve into the underlying structural dynamics that contribute to these visible 'symptoms'. Given that these government vocational institutions serve as core partners in donor peacebuilding projects, this section will also examine whether their institutional dynamics genuinely support peacebuilding, including efforts to address symbolic and structural violence, and whether they can maintain the presumption of impartiality in relation to state-led violence against marginalised groups.

While these challenges persist, government institutions remain the preferred partners for donors, who often presume that their governmental counterparts are detached from the state's violence against marginalised groups in Sudan's peripheries. Although some donors exercise caution, my own experience reflects a different reality: we frequently formed

genuine connections with Sudanese government counterparts without questioning their involvement in state violence. This dynamic mirrors the colonial era, when British officials primarily engaged Northern Sudanese elites (Sikainga 1996; see Section 4.4.1), reinforcing racial and ethnic inequalities across Sudan. Reflecting on my development work, I recognise how the assumption of vocational partners as inherently 'safe' and 'neutral' may have fostered a form of categorical violence, contributing to institutional blindness (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004).

7.3.2.1 National-Level Dynamics: Can't Build Peace While Spreading Violence

In many conflict-affected countries, collaborating with the national government and its agencies has become a standard practice for international donors implementing VT/EG programmes. Sudan follows this model, with key bilateral donors in the vocational training field, such as Germany, Japan and Korea, and multilateral organisations like the UNDP, ILO, and UN Peacekeeping Missions (e.g., UNAMID), primarily partnering with Sudanese government agencies and training centres to execute vocational training initiatives. Only a few, such as USAID, the EU, and AFD (France), work directly with NGOs, though even these projects often require some level of coordination with Khartoum and depend on government-run VTCs due to the scarcity of alternative providers.¹⁴⁵

In Sudan, the Supreme Council for Vocational Training and Apprenticeship (SCVTA) serves as a central government counterpart in vocational training initiatives, overseeing several VTCs in the Greater Khartoum area. Though the SCVTA falls under the Ministry of Human Resources Development and Labour (MoHRDL), donor pressure has forced it to collaborate with other training providers outside its usual jurisdiction, including ex-Youth Centres and Technical Schools in peripheral regions. This ad-hoc management structure has sparked territorial competition between the SCVTA and the National Council for Technical and Technological Education (NCTTE), which oversees Technical Schools (TSs).¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Robert, DFID, 4/7/2019.

¹⁴⁶ Interview, Bilal, 21/3/2019.

The competition is largely driven by the financial incentives and project benefits tied to international donor funds, which are highly attractive to civil servants, particularly during times of economic hardship. As well as project allowances and rehabilitation perks, logistical staff within Khartoum aid agencies may direct contracts toward family-owned companies,¹⁴⁷ further complicating these projects with potential kickbacks and favouritism. This financial incentive intensifies the desire of policymakers at ministries like MoHRDL to involve themselves in projects, even when lacking the means of direct project implementation.¹⁴⁸

Partnering with government actors in peacebuilding introduces complexities and risks. Although donors are generally aware of Khartoum's role in fuelling violence in peripheral areas, they tend to assume that only the most radical Islamist factions are involved. Technical agencies, such as the SCVTA and public VTCs, were often perceived as neutral; as such, donors maintain partnerships with them, seeing them as unconnected to government violence. However, lacking an in-depth understanding of Sudan's social and labour history, donors often misinterpret the involvement of national agencies and, like Osman, may see anti-government groups as "bad actors". In doing so, they continue to work with institutions that reinforce state control, unknowingly compromising their neutrality and the project's effectiveness.

Despite not being hubs of the most radical NCP members, these vocational training institutions are not immune to government influence. For instance, during El-Bashir's presidency, an ex-vice president pressured a vocational training head to sign a questionable land rights agreement; he initially refused but ultimately signed under threat of job loss.¹⁴⁹ This incident exemplifies how vocational training institutions, while often perceived as neutral, remain subject to state control and coercion (Chapter 6).

For many in marginalised regions, government involvement in vocational training initiatives undermines the very purpose of peacebuilding. While public VTCs may offer the best available training in these areas, historical violence by the Sudanese government has created deep-rooted mistrust, causing many to reject government-linked programmes. For

¹⁴⁷ Observation and Interview, Hussam, 8/7/2019.

¹⁴⁸ Interview, Ashraf, 26/3/2019.

¹⁴⁹ Interview, Hussam, 19/1/2019. This absolute loyalty to the NCP is similar to *partidarização*, the political 'party-isation' of public life and all social sectors (Schubert 2010:659), found in Angola.

people in these communities, participating in initiatives involving the government feels absurd and even offensive. Hazim, an ex-SPLM soldier and wage labourer, captured the sentiments of many in Sudan's periphery regarding the government's role in implementing international aid projects: "Even if there is goodwill from international partners like Japan, as long as the government is involved in any project, whether it is DDR or educational like vocational training, we [ex-SPLM soldiers] do not participate".¹⁵⁰ This perspective reflects a profound mistrust that remains largely invisible to international development workers like myself, who, often separated by layers of government intermediaries, receive only filtered information from the 'field'. Unless certain national staff working directly with aid agencies consciously listen to these voices, they are rarely acknowledged. Yet, even when these sentiments are heard, they often fail to prompt action because they are not fully registered by aid workers as urgent concerns, but overshadowed by everyday operational demands and a lack of deeper social or historical understanding of the issues. This oversight reveals an enduring donor optimism that casually disregards the complex conflict dynamics at play, inadvertently perpetuating a gap between aid intentions and local realities.

This reflection underscores the complexities of development work in conflict-affected areas such as Sudan, where institutional structures and individual perceptions shape and often limit critical engagement. As a development worker, I initially worked alongside government partners without questioning the implications, partly due to the institutional framework within development agencies that normalised these partnerships. Government counterparts frequently presented a facade of genuine investment in public welfare, with influential figures like Osman carefully constructing a narrative that portrays the government as sincerely engaged in peacebuilding.

However, this narrative, easily accepted by donors, demonstrates a form of casual ignorance or even everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992) towards the nuanced and entrenched conflict dynamics within Sudan. The naïve optimism of donors in viewing governmental agencies as peacebuilding partners perpetuates an oversimplified approach that often disregards the deep-seated social and political tensions. This misplaced confidence in government involvement widens the gap between peacebuilding initiatives and the realities

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Hazim, 23/4/2019.

of Sudan's conflict-affected regions, ultimately undermining the initiatives' credibility and impact.

7.3.2.2 State-Level Dynamics: VT/EG Projects as Money-Making Machines

An examination of state-level dynamics in implementing VT/EG highlights persistent ethical concerns about government involvement in peacebuilding—issues that mirror those raised at the national level (Section 7.3.2.1). The NCP's control over state VTCs through its agents goes beyond Khartoum, as does the risk that employment projects may fall short of peacebuilding goals. Structural issues such as budget mismanagement, chronic shortages, and the government's limited interest in vocational training leave state VTCs ill-equipped to address local labour market needs. Consequently, donor-funded VT/EG projects often become the primary income sources for VTCs and their trainers. The relationship between state VTCs and government actors, particularly governors, reveals the complexities and limitations of implementing VT/EG projects in such a politically charged, financially constrained context.

Kezan Influence and Political Manipulation: Complex Leadership

The NCP's control is apparent in everyday state-level institutional dynamics, raising concerns that VTCs may serve as sites of political manipulation by Kezan. Authority over VTCs often rests with senior government officials, especially the governor. As the state-level guardian of the Islamist state, the *wali*, or governor, became central to Kezan power at the state level during El-Bashir's implementation of tamkeen (Section 4.6.1).

A notable example is 'XVTC' (anonymised) in North Kordofan, selected as an implementing partner for peacebuilding projects funded by various donors. Abdullah, a young NCP appointee with extensive Kezan connections, now leads XVTC. While he brings increased activity, his lack of VT experience and solely technical background has led more seasoned trainers to see him as 'too inexperienced' for the role. The pattern of appointing NCP members without appropriate qualifications diminishes trainer morale, as reflected in one trainer's comment: "As long as you are NCP, even if you are young and inexperienced, you

can climb up the ladder. It never gets easy”.¹⁵¹ This sentiment illustrates the perception that NCP affiliation, rather than merit, drives career progression in public institutions (Chapter 6).

Donor Funds Misused, Corruption Protected, and Career Obstacles

A Sudanese programme officer with experience at XVTC noted that the NCP head could “use the international donors’ assistance in favour of the NCP”.¹⁵² According to him and XVTC insiders, a project funded by a major international donor was underway when the previous head, Zubair, also an NCP member, was arrested after suddenly disappearing from the centre. Zubair had reportedly sold XVTC’s donor-funded car without permission and kept the proceeds. Tamer, an XVTC staff member, exposed the misconduct by reporting it to Haroun, then-governor of North Kordofan. Fearing retaliation against Tamer for reporting corruption within the NCP, his colleagues were surprised when Haroun acted seriously on the matter, leading to Zubair’s arrest.

During questioning, Zubair claimed that an NCP minister had implied that he (Zubair) had free rein at the well-funded XVTC. Though found guilty and fined 150,000 SDG, 80% of his fine was covered by the NCP, illustrating how corruption can be protected by those in power, even if accountability surfaces intermittently.¹⁵³ The donor funding XVTC knew only of Zubair’s disappearance, not the corruption behind it, highlighting how donor involvement can inadvertently facilitate corruption, especially when NCP members shield each other. However, Zubair’s arrest shows that higher authorities may occasionally address misconduct when it involves lower-ranked NCP figures.

The NCP’s influence over VTCs extends beyond the role of the VTC head. Tamer, who consistently refused pressure to join the NCP, faced career barriers as a result. Despite ranking third out of 3,000 candidates in the VTC inspector exam, NISS intervened, notifying the selection committee of his lack of NCP affiliation. Consequently, Haroun, the same

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Phone interview, Hussam, 5/2/2023.

¹⁵³ Interview, Tamer, 30/3/2019.

governor who had once supported Tamer’s corruption complaint, removed him from the list of successful candidates.¹⁵⁴

Lack of Accountability and Donor Indifference

Such incidents are unsurprising to most Sudanese, who are accustomed to the NCP leveraging situations for its own benefit. Donor partnerships with the NCP are frequently used to enhance the government’s image without accountability. As one programme manager from a bilateral agency explained, public VTCs, funded by donors, often attribute achievements like training, facility refurbishment, and equipment provision entirely to the NCP, omitting any mention of the donors.¹⁵⁵ Hussam reported this misleading practice to his expat supervisor, but the issue was not followed up. This deceptive attribution builds a false image of the NCP as committed peacebuilders. For international donors to respond effectively to such reports, a solid grasp of Sudan’s conflict dynamics and history is essential; without this understanding, field reports risk being dismissed by Khartoum-based expat programme managers. Selecting the government as a primary implementing partner for peacebuilding efforts, therefore, requires careful consideration.

Abdullah’s Leadership Boosts Activity Despite Irony: Income-Driven Training Expansion

Despite the presence of corruption and the NCP’s control over XVTC, it is ironic that Abdullah’s leadership at XVTC had visibly boosted its growth and activity. The student intake had surged from 166 to 465—an achievement that Abdullah proudly attributed to being “thanks to the earlier donor intervention”.¹⁵⁶ XVTC now collaborates with 18 organisations, offering a variety of short-term VT programmes. Abdullah also enthusiastically stressed that Haroun, the governor, would help with the construction of the labs for IT, technical drawing, and languages. His emphasis on gubernatorial support mirrors Osman’s similar crediting of government roles in project success in Khartoum.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Interview, Hussam, 5/10/2019.

¹⁵⁶ Interview, Abdullah, 19/2/2019.

XVTC has extended its training efforts beyond in-house sessions to include mobile training initiatives, offering three-week courses in El-Rahad, funded by Plan Sudan and Vetcare, and targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs). These courses, conducted in partnership with the local organisation Itamu Care, cover electricity, home décor accessories, food processing for sales, and leather-making. XVTC also plans to replicate these programmes in El-Fula and El-Muglad in West Kordofan, but they are proceeding without conducting any local labour market research.¹⁵⁷ Driven by profit motives, XVTC prioritises efficiency over alignment with local needs, aiming to train as many students as possible within their limited time and budget. This approach reflects an assumption by project implementers that XVTC inherently understands the training needs for employment, bypassing tailored needs assessment in favour of scaling participant numbers.

Given XVTC's emphasis on expanding student numbers for funding, what initially appears as successful VTC expansion due to donor support becomes, on closer inspection, fraught with challenges. This focus on quantity over quality mirrors practices observed in tamkeen-era higher education (Section 4.6.1). A JICA evaluation of VT/EG projects in Darfur and the Protocol Area¹⁵⁸ revealed a similar trend: training centres equipped by donors attracted more students than they could effectively train. Although initially considered positive, this overcrowding ultimately compromised the quality of training (FASID 2018:21).

XVTC has similarly embraced short courses to generate income, allowing the head and instructors to supplement their below-average incomes compared to public school teachers. For instance, Plan Sudan pays approximately 8,000 SDG (133 USD) for a 45-day teaching stint, with increases for larger enrolments, an essential supplement given Abdullah's base salary of 2,000 SDG (33 USD) and trainers' salaries at 1,200 SDG (20 USD).¹⁵⁹ Even junior public-school teachers earn 1,000 SDG. This need for extra income drives a focus on enrolment numbers, often resulting in overcrowded classrooms and declining teaching quality, which has become part of the institutional dynamics within project implementation.

¹⁵⁷ Interview, Abdullah, 19/2/2019.

¹⁵⁸ The Protocol Areas are South Kordofan, Blue Nile and Abyei.

¹⁵⁹ Interview, Shoaib, 31/3/2019.

Structural Challenges in Funding

The roots of these behaviours are complex and embedded in structural issues. Public VTCs in Sudan, as part of the government system, rely on Khartoum for their funding. However, the national government's focus on conflicts in peripheral areas has diverted funds away from sectors like education and health, including vocational training (Nuba Reports 2016). Prioritisation of defence spending and efforts to curb corruption have led to all national-level budgets being consolidated under the Ministry of Finance (MoF). At the state level, budget control rests with the governor and the State Ministry of Finance (SMoF), even though, technically, public VTCs fall under the State Ministry of Human Resources Development and Labour (SMoHRDL). This arrangement often leaves VTCs dependent on MoF or SMoF officials who lack a full understanding of their challenges, resulting in a chronic lack of policy focus and financial resources. Even when budgets are approved, they may not be fully executed, forcing public VT institutions to cancel planned activities (JICA and KRC 2021:7–1).

This limited attention is compounded by the perception among national and state policymakers that donor-funded sectors such as vocational training do not require any additional domestic resources. Some Sudanese vocational training experts working with international organisations argue that donor involvement is precisely why government budgets for vocational training remain minimal or absent. As Faheem, a development agency officer, explained, “we think that the [Sudanese] government tends to ignore allocating budget when there is a foreign component...because it hopes that, for example, JICA or UN will take care of all the expenses”.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, public VTCs are increasingly dependent on donor funding for basic operations. This dependence was not anticipated by donors, who assumed their investment would prompt the Sudanese government to co-invest and sustain vocational training projects, thereby amplifying the impact of these initiatives. However, although government counterparts may report budget increases or staff additions as outcomes of donor cooperation, agencies often lack the mechanisms to verify if these reports reflect genuine progress toward self-sustainability.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, Faheem, 5/10/2019.

Government vocational institutions in Sudan operate within a financially strained and structurally complex environment, where budget constraints, dependence on donor funds, and pressures from Khartoum deeply shape their institutional dynamics. These dynamics render these institutions ill-equipped to genuinely align with peacebuilding goals. Rather than addressing local labour market needs or fostering stability, vocational institutions often prioritise income generation, even at the expense of training quality, due to economic pressures and the pervasive influence of political agendas. This structural alignment with Khartoum's interests, often invisible to donors, underpins a form of institutional violence (Galtung 1969b) that contradicts the principles of neutrality and peacebuilding. Consequently, despite donor assumptions of their suitability, these institutions are, in many ways, fundamentally misaligned with the goals of peace and social equity.

7.3.3 Targets: Choosing the Powerful and Well-Connected?

The selection process for VT/EG projects in Sudan is deeply political, with implications that stretch beyond employment to touch upon social power structures and reinforce local hierarchies. Just as *wasta* influences job placements (Chapter 6), project targeting can be swayed by local power dynamics and the priorities of the NCP. Cramer and Weeks (1997) caution that targeting is inherently “exclusionary and discriminatory”, raising transparency and impartiality challenges, particularly acute in conflict-affected regions. Izzi (2020) further highlights that target selection is central to the political economy of employment, where loosely defined criteria often result in the marginalisation of certain groups. Evaluations of similar projects, such as Bahnassi's (2014), reveal selection processes that frequently lack rigorous oversight, allowing personal, tribal, or political biases to shape outcomes. Donors—often constrained by limited insight into the nuanced needs of beneficiaries—frequently rely on local partners, expecting them to ensure impartiality aligned with project goals. This pattern was evident during my previous work; while broad criteria and layers of oversight were in place, local partners ultimately handled the selection process. From my vantage point, working comfortably from an air-conditioned office in Khartoum, the selection process felt like a minor detail within the broader project framework, and I lacked the mindset to rigorously monitor its integrity. However, as this section will explore, these selection dynamics extend into a continuum of violence, reframing project participation as a

form of ‘categorical violence’. Within this framework, social groups are allocated training opportunities based on prevailing power structures in local labour regimes, rather than in pursuit of genuine equity.

7.3.3.1 Target Criteria in Sudan VT/EG Projects

In Sudan, criteria for VT/EG projects generally include variables such as gender, age, location, education level, and employment status. Given that labour data analysis highlights high unemployment among youth and women (MoHRDL 2014:103) (Section 7.2.3), projects are designed to target precisely these categories. When peacebuilding is a specific project aim, ‘conflict-affectedness’ becomes an additional criterion, often including ex-combatants, IDPs, and war widows. According to a Khartoum-based UNDP programme manager, such groups are viewed as “the most vulnerable members of the communities because they want to work and earn money but cannot”.¹⁶¹ While many do, indeed, face precarious employment and social vulnerability, the fluid nature of conflict-affected identities complicates efforts to identify those most in need of support. Access to services often depends on one’s ability to advocate for one’s inclusion, and verification of such status is challenging, if not absent altogether.

A terminal evaluation of a JICA VT/EG project for peacebuilding in Darfur and the Protocol Areas (Phase 1), involving national-level partners SCVTA and NCTTE (see Section 7.3.2.1) and local implementing partner XVTC (see Section 7.3.2.2), highlighted an absence of clear selection criteria for target trainees (JICA 2013a:51). In the Phase 2 project formulation report, JICA and its consultant team expanded on this critique, observing that government counterparts had selected participants who “meet *their* objectives” (emphasis mine) (JICA et al. 2014:4). Although the project targets included the designated categories of unemployed youth, IDPs, and ex-combatants, the selected participants often included employed or skilled workers, with ages ranging from teenagers to individuals over 50, some of whom had affiliations with the government. Acknowledging these discrepancies, JICA highlighted the

¹⁶¹ Interview, Brinsley, 28/1/2019.

need for more precise selection criteria, particularly in the context of peacebuilding objectives (JICA et al. 2014:5).

In western Sudan, donor-funded VT/EG projects have mainly focused on two target groups (see Table 12).¹⁶² The first includes unemployed youth, often IDPs, returnees, or ex-combatants, predominantly male and aged 20-30. This is the group whom development workers assume are 'would-be-criminals' or have "conflict-carrying capacity" (UNDP 2017:20) with limited access to higher education and thus in need of vocational skills to improve employability (see 7.3.1.2).

Their training typically includes traditional trades such as welding, electricity, auto-mechanics, and machinery, with the expectation that participants will secure employment in workshops or companies. This form of 'self-employment', though, resembles peddler-type work with minimal income rather than stable, high-earning self-employment (see Figure 20). In my experience, despite initial interventions focused solely on vocational training, low post-training employment rates persisted. Consequently, later training rounds included start-up kits, aiming to enhance employability on the assumption—aligned with a human capital interpretation of Say's Law—that they would naturally lead to job creation. While providing tools offered some immediate utility, it ultimately brought little visible improvement in sustainable employment outcomes.

The second group consists of older women in their 30s and above, often divorced, abandoned, or widowed due to conflict. Training for these women covers 'non-conventional' areas such as food processing, handicrafts/accessories, dressmaking/sewing, and leather-making, reflecting donor interest. After training, these women are expected to establish either a regular outside self-employed business or a home-based self-employed business that complements their existing domestic responsibilities. Tools provided at course completion are intended to promote entrepreneurship, yet the burden of securing stable employment remains on the trainees themselves.

¹⁶² Interview, Claudia, 15/5/2019. Michi, 23/1/2019; Ueno, 29/1/2019.

Table 12. Typical Characteristics of Target Groups in Conflict-Affected Regions

Group	Youth	Women
Gender	Men and Women	Women
Age	Teenage to the mid-30s	30s and above
Status	Unemployed, IDPs, Returnees, Ex-combatants	Unemployed, Divorced, Widowed, Abandoned
Training type	Traditional	Non-conventional
Training Subjects	Auto-mechanics, Machinery, Electricity, Welding	Food processing, Accessories/Handcraft, Dressmaking/Sewing, Leather-making
Expected employment route after training	Employed by workshop or company	Home-based, self-employment at home
Start-up kits	Tool box, work clothes	Basic tools

While these criteria aim to assist marginalised groups, their generality and ambiguity often fail to account for complex individual circumstances. For example, determining if a youth is unemployed or economically inactive can be skewed by biased questioning or subjective judgments. Similarly, assessing women’s marital status as conflict-related may overlook other contributing factors, as marital abandonment can stem from multiple structural issues beyond conflict alone. Consequently, the broad criteria applied in target selection often result in the inclusion of participants who may not be directly impacted by conflict.

The broad, ambiguous criteria in VT/EG projects allow implementing partners significant discretion in selecting candidates. In JICA’s VT/EG project, this lack of specificity enabled government counterparts to select participants based on their own preferences, bypassing a fair and transparent process. Development workers hoped that using a fair selection tool, including public advertisements on radio and in newspapers, would enhance transparency, ensure accountability, and broaden access to marginalised groups—promoting a more inclusive, peace-oriented approach.¹⁶³ This assumption, however, reveals the degree to which development workers, including myself, could be naïvely removed from local realities (Ferguson 1999). I initially trusted that government institutions would see this project as a means to foster connections with their citizens, without considering the likelihood of the government exploiting the situation for its own interests. Lacking genuine intent to include the most marginalised, the government’s actions remained opaque, leaving the projects unable to verify whether public announcements were made at all.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Interview, Suleyman, 5/2/2019.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

The government's disregard for selection criteria also surfaced in an unexpected discovery by Sudanese project officer Hussam in Blue Nile state (Section 7.3.2.2). Assigned to monitor VT/EG activities aimed at unemployed and socio-economically marginalised youth, including ex-combatants from rebel groups, in peacebuilding interventions, Hussam instead found that many of the selected participants were Popular Defence Forces (PDF) members, a paramilitary force loyal to the NCP.¹⁶⁵ Further investigation revealed that the remaining participants were not unemployed; they were skilled workers holding secondary school certificates and were far from socio-economically marginalised within their communities.

Ensuring fair target selection based on criteria and public announcements presents a significant challenge for donors and development workers working with the government. Although donors may push for transparent measures, they lack direct control over government processes, making verification of participant eligibility difficult. Conversations with trainees at XVTC—recipients of a donor-funded peacebuilding project for ‘unemployed vulnerable youth’ from West and South Kordofan—revealed that many came from affluent backgrounds, often children of wealthy NCP supporters and influential local families in Al-Fula, the homeland of the Messiria tribe. Indicators of wealth, such as mobile phones, signalled their privileged status. In regions like Darfur and Kordofan, tribal and political affiliations appear to heavily influence trainee selection, creating barriers to true inclusivity and limiting the ability of these programmes to reach the most vulnerable in conflict-affected areas. Despite donor efforts toward fair selection, tribal and political biases persist, undermining efforts to prioritise the most marginalised groups.

7.3.3.2 Fuelling the War: NCP Domination in Target Selection and Post-Training Placement/Employment

The dominance of the NCP in target selection, combined with vague criteria, poses risks for donor-funded VT/EG projects aiming for peacebuilding. By partnering with government agencies, these projects can unintentionally bolster government control, especially in the defence and security sectors, which may undermine peacebuilding goals. This arrangement

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Hussam, 5/10/2019.

enables the NCP to further entrench its power, raising concerns that such projects might ultimately work against their intended objectives.

In the JICA-funded VT/EG initiative, “Project for Strengthening Vocational Training in Sudan” (2013b), which aimed to enhance SCVTA’s vocational training capacity for employment and income generation, private sector partnerships became essential for supporting trainee employment. In a meeting between SCVTA and private sector partners, SCVTA invited several companies, including Yarmouk—a state-owned arms manufacturer known internationally after a 2012 Israeli airstrike, and allegedly co-owned by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard (Harel and Issacharoff 2012). I later realised that Yarmouk had become a key recruiter of training graduates. While the project was classified as an employment and income generation initiative focused on capacity building for SCVTA, it also indirectly supported peacebuilding by guiding SCVTA in assisting socially vulnerable groups, including ex-combatants (JICA 2013b:46). Initially, I reacted passively to Yarmouk’s involvement, a reaction I now recognise as rooted in limited contextual awareness and a lack of critical reflection on positionality (Mwambari 2019), sustained by institutional ignorance (Mosse 2004), which inadvertently normalised the inclusion of belligerent actors in development projects.

The second phase of JICA’s VT/EG initiative, following the initial “Project for Strengthening Vocational Training in Sudan”, was implemented in Kosti from 2016 to 2021 under the title “The Project for Strengthening the Vocational Training System Targeting State Vocational Training Centers” (GEMS) (see Section 7.3.1.1). However, flaws emerged in both target selection and post-training employment. Targets included already employed individuals, such as “governmental drivers” and “workers of the White Nile Sugar Factory” (JICA et al. 2021:A-12). Although formally classified as a capacity-building project for youth employment, it also included a peacebuilding aim by justifying employment support for disarmed soldiers (*ibid.*, 3-2), IDPs, and refugees (*ibid.* 2-47)—groups positioned as “socially vulnerable”.

A separate JICA project on data collection (2021:3–5) revealed that a year after graduation from vocational training that this project (GEMS) supported, 38.7% of Kosti VTC graduates—the highest proportion—had been conscripted into the Sudanese Armed Forces as part of the mandatory National Service, while 35.5% remained unemployed, and only 17.7% had

found other employment. This has implications for human capital theory, suggesting that without National Service roles, youth unemployment might exceed 35.5%, highlighting the limited impact of vocational training on employment. Additionally, partnering directly with government institutions risks unintentionally reinforcing Sudan's military capacity. Training youth who ultimately serve in defence roles hardly aligns with peacebuilding, and instead, reinforces the Sudanese government's military influence—a form of symbolic and structural violence that development aid indirectly supports.

The dominance of the NCP in Sudan has fostered an attitude of superiority and confidence, notably influencing how organisations, including the Women's Union, engage with development organisations in the VT/EG sector. Women constitute a significant target group for many peacebuilding projects, based on the labour data analysis of the unemployed (Section 7.2.3), and the Women's Union has actively participated in target selection and training delivery. However, many donors and development workers may not have been fully aware of the Union's historical origins and its close links to the NCP, functioning primarily as a social organisation for female NCP supporters. While this connection was less known among expatriate programme managers, including myself, in 2016, by 2019, awareness had increased. Consequently, some programme managers began engaging with the Women's Union with greater caution. Claudia, an expatriate programme manager from a European bilateral agency, recounted that when she proposed extending training opportunities to other women's organisations, rather than exclusively working with the Women's Union, the Union subtly 'warned' of 'consequences' should they be excluded.¹⁶⁶ Confronted by this pressure, Claudia ultimately included the Union in the project to ensure its smooth progress, reluctantly acknowledging that such compromises were sometimes necessary.

In the selection of training targets, a significant element of power-sharing and 'respect' for Sudan's dominant political entity and largest employer, the NCP government, is evident, particularly given the volume of donor resources channelled through government-controlled entities. Donors frequently face compromises in target selection, yielding to the advocacy of the NCP 'family' to maintain operational stability. Despite their financial influence, donors

¹⁶⁶ Interview, Claudia, 15/5/2019.

are often compelled to choose between cooperating with the NCP network or withdrawing from Sudan entirely. As Munive (2013) discusses in the context of reintegration programmes in South Sudan, patronage networks frequently influence participation, as exemplified by ex-combatants using connections with SPLA commanders to enrol family members. Similarly, the selection biases in Sudan's VT/EG sector underscore the entrenched power dynamics in the country, with patronage and institutionalised proxy participation influencing programme outcomes and, ultimately, presenting persistent challenges for donors navigating Sudan's complex political terrain.

7.3.3.3 El-Rahad VT/EG for Peacebuilding: Invisible 'Should-Be' Target

This sub-section provides an overview of a VT/EG project funded by the EU and German Vetcare, implemented by Sudan Vetcare, aiming to improve employment opportunities for 50 IDPs from the Abu Kershola conflict residing in El-Rahad. The vocational training, subcontracted to XVTC through Itamu Care, a local El-Rahad organisation, relied on the Social Protection Unit of the El-Rahad locality government to identify participants. Guided by the predefined target criteria outlined by an XVTC instructor, the programme aimed specifically to support Abu Kershola IDPs experiencing compounded socio-economic vulnerabilities, such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to essential services. These IDPs were expected to reside in 'designated camps' under the leadership of recognised community figures.¹⁶⁷ This language, familiar from project formulation proposals I often reviewed, was somewhat incongruous with the reality in El-Rahad, where Governor Haroun had actively discouraged the establishment of camps to deflect international humanitarian attention (see Section 3.1.2.2). Despite the formal criteria, informal mechanisms such as *wasta* and family affiliations continued to influence actual access, underscoring the weight of social connections in selection processes. Through contacts within XVTC and a snowball sampling approach, I identified three female participants for this study, and one woman who was not selected, focusing on women's experiences, though the programme included male participants as well.

¹⁶⁷ Interview, Siddig, 31/3/2019.

Based on interviews and life history accounts with the selected female participants of the project, Table 13 summarises the socio-economic characteristics of each participant.¹⁶⁸ Despite their individual differences, the three female participants shared common socio-economic characteristics that influenced their selection for the training programme. All three secured their places through personal connections, or *wasta*, with family members or acquaintances tied to local implementing partners. While public advertisements were issued, the selection process was largely shaped by these social ties.

¹⁶⁸ Interviews, Hala, Rania 17/7/2019, Wafaa, 17/7/2019, 4/9/2019.

Table 13. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Female VT Participants and the Unselected Female El-Rahad Resident

Selection	Selected			Not Selected
Course	Food Processing	Accessories	Leather	N/A
Name	Hala	Rania	Wafaa	Akoi
Age	29	30	30	30
Religion	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Christian (Catholic)
Nationality	Sudanese	Sudanese	Sudanese	Sudanese
Tribe	Bedairiah	Tagali, stressed that she is not Nuba	Bargo but mother is Tagali	Dinka Abyei
Education	Bachelor	8th grade	5th grade	No education
Marital status	Married with a child	Married with children (didn't ask the number)	Divorced without consultation, was the 1st wife, 3 children	Unmarried with 2 children
Residence in El-Rahad	Very nice concrete house in Shatty Shumal	Concrete house in Banjadeed Sharg	Previously concrete in the centre and moved to 'stick house' north of the highway (high quality)	Stick house (low quality) in Shatty Janoub, occupying empty house for free
Water	Pipe	Pipe	No, inside El-Rahad or Torda	No, Torda or neighbour
Electricity	Yes	Yes	No	No
Migration/Displacement	El-Rahad - Khartoum for university	Abu Kershola - El-Rahad	Um Beir-Abu Kershola for education - El-Rahad	El-Rahad - Northern - Sennar -Abeyi
Residence of other family members	Newcastle/UK (husband studying for Masters), Khartoum	Khartoum, El-Obeid	Um Beir, Khartoum, Liri	N/A
Work besides domestic tasks	No	Charcoal business with family in SK (brother lorry driver)	Tea lady, charcoal business with family in SK	Alcohol making
Lands	Yes, Hageina (west of El-Rahad)	Yes	Yes, 300 mohamas in Um Bair	No lands (family work as wage laboures)
Growing	Fruits like guava	Sesame, okra, millet, vegetables	Sesame, millet, vegetables	N/A
How did you get in training?	Relative works for Itamu Care	Sister works for Itamu Care, also knew Rayan in the locality government	Samiah, the trainer of food processing. Used to live in a house next to Ali, a brother of Samiah	N/A
Who bought the training achievement	Neighbour	Neighbour	Neighbour	N/A
Profitable?	Some	No because had to pay for food to get people to buy	Some	N/A
Continuing?	No, wants to teach in secondary schools	No, lack of capital	Yes, wants to widen the business though little support	N/A
Conflict Affectedness	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, but not Abu Keshola related
Class for El-Rahad	Upper-middle	Middle	At least middle with 300 mohamas but otherwise lower-middle	Lower

Hala: Privilege through Wasta and Socio-Economic Stability

Hala, a 29-year-old Bedairiah woman from El-Rahad, lives in a concrete house in Shatti Shumal, which includes a well-maintained garden, a satellite dish, and reliable access to piped water and electricity. Her family is well-known locally as landlords and owns substantial land in Hageina, where they cultivate high-value fruits, such as guava. She also

has family living in Khartoum. At the time, Hala's husband was studying for a master's degree in the UK, a rare achievement for someone from El-Rahad, and he regularly sent her remittances.

Hala has no previous history of displacement and has never been an IDP. Despite not fitting any of the programme's eligibility criteria, she received training in food processing through her relative who works at Itamu Care. After completing the training, she sold cakes to her neighbours and also claimed to sell her products to a nearby shop, stating it was profitable; however, her responses appeared aligned with what the interviewer might want to hear. Although enrolled in food processing, Hala's aspiration is to become a school teacher, and she is not currently involved in any other income-generating activities beyond her household responsibilities.

Rania: Navigating Socio-Economic Comfort and Tribal Hierarchies

Rania, a 30-year-old Tagali (or Taqali) woman from Abu Kershola, has an 8th-grade education and is married with children. When discussing her Tagali ethnic group, she emphasised that the Tagali are distinct from the Nuba, seemingly to avoid categorisation with them and reinforcing the sense of ethnic hierarchy. Historically, the Tagali people originated from the Islamic kingdom of Tagali (1780–1935), located in the northeastern Nuba hills (Ewald 1985:265). As Ewald further analyses, "Taqali thinkers draw on ostensibly ethnic categories to express the important political, social, and religious relationships of their past. The terms 'Arab' are employed in Taqali" (ibid., 267). Although the Tagali are situated in the Nuba Mountains, they identify as 'Arab', a term I rarely encountered among ethnically Nuba individuals, suggesting that Tagali people maintain a sense of distinction and superiority from the Nuba based on social identity (Demmers 2012).

Categorised as an 'IDP' from Abu Kershola, Rania's economic situation is comparatively stable, positioning her above some non-IDPs in El-Rahad. She lives in a concrete house in Banjadeed Sharg, a central neighbourhood in El-Rahad, with access to water and electricity. Her family in Abu Kershola owns land where they cultivate sesame, okra, millet, and other vegetables, and she has extended family in El-Obeid and Khartoum. To supplement her income, she sells charcoal from her home, which is delivered by her lorry-driver brother.

Rania accessed the training opportunity through her sister, who worked at Itamu Care, and also maintains connections with Rayan, a social protection officer from a prominent family in El-Rahad. Enrolled in an accessories-making course, she later sold her products to neighbours; however, to encourage sales, she invited them for lunch, which ultimately cost her more than she earned. She expressed limited interest in accessories-making, attributing her disengagement to a lack of capital and the fees required to sell her products.

Wafaa: Navigating Precarity and Limited Wasta

Wafaa, a 30-year-old woman from Um Beir, a rural outskirts of Abu Kershola, has a 5th-grade education and supplements her income by working as a tea lady and selling charcoal on the side. Her father is Bargo and her mother is Taqali, categorising her as Bargo because Sudanese ethnic classification follows the father's ethnicity, placing her in the 'African' category in the broader racial dichotomy (Hoile 2006). Her family owns 300 mohamas in Um Beir, where they grow cash crops, including sesame and millet. When violence intensified, Wafaa's family initially moved from Um Beir to Abu Kershola and later to El-Rahad, experiencing multiple displacements as conflict escalated. After her husband abandoned her, she now lives with her children and her extended family in a 'stick house' on the northern side of the El-Rahad-El-Obeid highway; there is no electricity or water—a long walk is necessary to collect the latter. This area is also where NISS attempted to relocate many South Sudanese, including individuals like Akoi. Unlike Rania, who sells charcoal from her centrally located home, Wafaa sells her charcoal from her tea-selling spot.

Wafaa meets all the criteria for the VT/EG project's target group of 'Abu Kershola IDPs'. Unlike Hala or Rania, who had family connections, Wafaa was invited to participate by Samiah, a Gawamaa food processing trainer at XVTC, whose brother had lived next door to Wafaa when she first arrived in El-Rahad. Samiah, known for her experience and dedication, remembered Wafaa's hard work and chose her for the training, despite being unaffiliated with any social membership or political interests. This personal approach to selection allowed individuals such as Wafaa, who lacked influential connections, to join the programme despite the usual advantages held by well-connected or NCP-affiliated candidates. Samiah's honest and individualised selection process, independent of her formal

role at XVTC, bypassed typical political and tribal biases, enabling deserving candidates to access training opportunities regardless of their affiliations.

Wafaa's enthusiasm and dedication to applying new skills after training make her an ideal candidate for the VT/EG project. Her hard-working nature and willingness to pursue income-generating opportunities align well with the project's goals. However, while her socio-economic situation in El-Rahad qualifies her as eligible, she was not among the poorest residents if we exclude her status as an Abu Kershola IDP. Her family's ownership of substantial land in Um Beir and her 5th-grade education, a notable achievement in the rural context, imply a degree of wealth back home. Her 'stick' house in El-Rahad—built with quality materials and larger than many other similar structures—suggest that, compared to some in El-Rahad, her background includes a degree of stability.

Akoi: The 'Invisible' Should-Be Beneficiary

Akoi, a 30-year-old unmarried Dinka Abyei Catholic woman with two children, has no formal educational background (Section 5.4.4.2). She squats in a 'stick house' in Shatty Janoub, on the outskirts of El-Rahad. Her home is of lower quality than Wafaa's, and also has no access to electricity or water; she travels to Torda to collect water. Originally from conflict-affected Abyei, Akoi has moved across Sudan, from El-Rahad to Northern State, Sennar State, and then back to El-Rahad, primarily in search of work. Her family works as wage labourers without owning any land. Akoi supports her family by brewing beer and distilling aragi, a traditional alcoholic spirit, though it yields minimal income and exposes her to police raids, further entrenching her marginalisation within Sudan's social hierarchy.

Despite her socio-economic precarity, she remains excluded from VT/EG opportunities due to her position as a racial, ethnic, and religious outsider, and her lack of *wasta* (social connections), both of which are key determinants of access. As a result, she exemplifies the 'ideal' candidate for VT/EG support, yet remains systematically sidelined by the very selection process intended to uplift the most vulnerable.

Comparative Reflection on Programme Outcomes and Limitations

Reflecting on the diverse socio-economic conditions of participants highlights significant limitations within the VT/EG programme's structure and selection process. Participants such as Hala and Rania accessed training due to family connections, enabling one-time sales that were primarily sustained by social networks rather than the appeal or affordability of their products to the broader community in El-Rahad. This limitation suggests that, without tailoring training to local needs—as was the case with XVTC, which prioritised its own income generation (Section 7.3.2.2)—the programme fails to equip participants with profitable skills, exposing the gap between training provision and market realities. Rania's quick disengagement from accessory-making illustrates how socio-economic stability can lessen reliance on acquired skills, reflecting the flawed assumption of human capital theory that training alone will foster job creation.

In contrast, Wafaa's dedication to exploring leatherwork highlights the potential value of supporting participants based on genuine financial need and motivation. However, the programme's reliance on rigid classifications, such as targeting only those identified as 'Abu Kershola IDPs', reveals how categorical labels can obscure a nuanced understanding of participants' socio-economic realities. For example, Rania, while classified as an IDP, benefits from socio-economic resources that exceed those of many non-IDP residents in El-Rahad, indicating the limitations of overly broad classifications that fail to account for individual needs. This oversight exemplifies the exclusion of participants like Akoi, who, despite fitting the socio-economic profile of vulnerable individuals, was sidelined due to her lack of *wasta* and her identity as a racial and ethnic outsider.

Akoi's case underscores how the selection process, embedded in racial, ethnic, and religious hierarchies, systematically disadvantages those outside the programme's 'family' network rooted in Arab Islamism, exposing entrenched biases that render the most vulnerable invisible. Her exclusion illustrates categorical violence, where rigid social and ethnic classifications marginalise individuals, effectively erasing them within the existing social hierarchy. The programme's selection process favours established social networks over genuine socio-economic need, revealing that 'family' connections often outweigh vulnerability when determining access to training opportunities.

Employment generation projects, therefore, carry multiple layers of categorical violence, favouring or excluding individuals based on their belonging to certain social 'families'. This

invisible violence is often normalised and justified under the guise of maintaining social and family cohesion, paradoxically through peacebuilding projects. How can true peace be achieved when VT/EG projects themselves perpetuate and regenerate these structures of violence? As Izzi (2013:103) critiques in her analysis of youth employment projects, such peacebuilding efforts often reduce vocational training to “just keeping them busy”, ultimately failing to deliver meaningful or lasting impact.

7.4 Conclusion

This conclusion revisits how categorical violence, entrenched through labour policymakers and international development agencies’ reliance on rigid classifications and unequal categorical pair (Tilly 1999), fosters institutional blindness (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004) that perpetuates symbolic (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004) and structural violence (Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969b) within Sudan’s peacebuilding and employment initiatives. Rooted in categorical pairs—such as educated/uneducated, central/peripheral, and conflict-prone/non-prone—these initiatives impose fixed boundaries that dehumanise and marginalise rural Sudanese workers. These rigid classifications extend beyond simple participant organisation, contributing to a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004) that places the responsibility of finding a job on project participants and casts disadvantaged youth, especially in rural areas, as inherently predisposed to violence. This portrayal not only ignores the broader socio-economic and historical context of Sudan and its labour regimes but actively perpetuates exclusion and marginalisation through a continuum of violence (Bourgois 2004).

In alignment with Tilly’s (1999) inequality-making mechanisms, these institutional practices reflect stages of ‘emulation’ and ‘adaptation’, reproducing existing inequalities by rendering certain communities invisible within labour data, structures, and regimes. By examining data collection practices and project implementation, this chapter highlights how institutional blindness deepens the issue of labour data poverty (Oya 2013), which further limits development agencies’ ability to effectively address Sudan’s complex socio-political landscape. Constrained by frameworks that privilege supply-side factors (Amsden 2010), particularly a focus on skills deficits and rational choice theory’s emphasis on individual

agency, these agencies uncritically adopt reductive narratives that frame skills gaps as the primary cause of unemployment and view unemployment itself as a primary driver of conflict. Such perspectives overlook the demand-side limitations, entrenched patriarchal relations, state control over job opportunities, citizenship-based hierarchies, and longstanding historical inequalities (Jok 2007; Mahmoud 1984; O'Neill and O'Brien 1988; Sikainga 1996; Wells 1996) that are deeply embedded within Sudan's labour regimes. Rather than incidental, these omissions reflect a broader alignment with Khartoum's hierarchical power structures, presenting peripheral regions as inherently inferior within the national labour framework.

In emphasising narrow categorisations and selective inclusion, development interventions underscore categorical violence as a mechanism of everyday, symbolic, and structural violence that produces and sustains inequality along both lines of classification and the act of classifying itself. This process renders certain groups 'invisible' within labour regimes and sidelines meaningful responses to the roots of poverty and conflict. As a result, international agencies unintentionally become complicit in sustaining the very inequalities that they aim to address, normalising exclusion and reinforcing inequitable structures rather than fostering genuine inclusivity and resilience.

In critiquing the international community's role, this conclusion highlights how development initiatives, by prioritising project efficiency over socio-economic inclusivity and context-specific understanding, contribute to a form of institutional violence (Galtung 1969) that not only reproduces social disparities but also reinforces symbolic and structural violence against Sudan's rural workers. Consequently, the intended peacebuilding outcomes of these employment initiatives often remain unfulfilled, with projects reinforcing, rather than dismantling, patterns of marginalisation. In overlooking the complex realities of Sudan's rural labour dynamics, these agencies fail to engage critically with the mechanisms of inequality that drive marginalisation, normalising an inequitable and exclusionary system that relegates vulnerable populations to the periphery of social and economic progress. Through this lens, the chapter critiques the international community's role in maintaining and regenerating systemic inequality, underscoring the need for development practices that truly recognise the social complexities and historical realities underpinning Sudan's labour regimes.

This conclusion, therefore, highlights a deeply entrenched complicity within international development agencies and their peacebuilding initiatives. By prioritising project efficiency over socio-economic inclusivity and context-specific understanding, these agencies contribute to a form of institutional violence (Galtung 1969b) that not only reproduces social disparities but also reinforces symbolic and structural violence against Sudan's rural workers. As a result, the intended peacebuilding outcomes of these employment initiatives often remain unfulfilled (Brück et al. 2021; Cramer 2015; Izzi 2013), with projects perpetuating marginalisation rather than fostering inclusivity. In ignoring the complex realities of Sudan's rural labour dynamics, agencies fail to engage critically with the mechanisms of inequality that drive marginalisation, normalising an inequitable and exclusionary system that places vulnerable populations on the periphery of both social and economic progress. Through this lens, the chapter critiques the policymakers and development agencies' role in maintaining and regenerating this systemic inequality and exploitation, underscoring the pressing need for a shift in development practices that recognises the social complexities and historical realities underpinning Sudan's labour regimes.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Categorical Violence as a Lens on Rural Labour Regimes in Sudan

In returning to the core research question—how labour market and labour regime dynamics are implicated in the process of maintaining and regenerating violence—this thesis has made a contribution through the development of the concept of categorical violence. This concept reveals how the historical, social, political, and institutional mechanisms inherent in Sudan’s labour regimes systematically embed subtle but deeply rooted forms of violence that continually shape the country’s socio-economic landscape. By foregrounding categorical violence, the thesis challenges conventional understandings of violence and labour, demonstrating that categorisation itself—who gains access to work, under what conditions, and how that work is valued or devalued—operates within a broader continuum of violence that stretches from the daily lived experiences of rural workers to the level of policy intervention.

How Categorical Violence Sheds Light on Rural Labour Regimes

Categorical violence emerges as a powerful lens for understanding how classification not only reflects socio-political power but actively maintains it, manifesting as a core mechanism of control and marginalisation. Categories of race, gender, ethnicity, and religion, historically rooted and reinforced by elites, do not just label groups; they assign value (or lack thereof) to the types of work these groups perform. In Sudan’s rural labour regimes, categorical violence thus becomes a mechanism for producing structural and symbolic violence, casting certain forms of labour as ‘unproductive’ or ‘inferior’ and rendering groups such as women, darker-skinned individuals, and rural workers invisible within everyday labour and everyday life (Mezzadri, Newman, and Stevano 2022b). This invisibility has direct implications: it influences who gains access to resources, whose labour is counted, and whose contributions are acknowledged, effectively creating a cycle where the marginalised remain marginalised by the very systems meant to recognise and address inequality.

The Regenerative Nature of Violence in Labour Regimes

One striking insight from this thesis is how categorical violence functions cyclically within Sudan's labour regimes, continuously regenerating the conditions that perpetuate marginalisation and exclusion. As the thesis has shown, the categorisations imposed by state actors and development agencies reinforce the socio-economic hierarchies established by Sudanese elites over generations, embedding these divisions in labour practices and peacebuilding interventions alike. By focusing on rigid classifications and binary distinctions—such as 'educated/uneducated' or 'central/peripheral'—international development efforts contribute to what Tilly (1999) describes as mechanisms of inequality, such as opportunity hoarding, emulation, and adaptation. These mechanisms allow elites and dominant groups to reinforce their power while systematically excluding groups relegated to lower classifications. The regeneration of violence thus emerges as both structural (Farmer 2004; Galtung 1969b) and symbolic (Bourdieu 2001; Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004), forming a continuum of violence (Bourgois 2004; Cockburn 2009) that is perpetuated through development initiatives aimed at peacebuilding but that inadvertently reinforce deep-seated inequalities.

Reflection on Institutional Blindness and Development Practice

The analysis of institutional dynamics around labour data collection and VT/EG-centred peacebuilding initiatives from a categorical violence perspective—drawing on reflexivity (Geertz 1972) and positionality (Mwambari 2019)—highlights the institutional blindness embedded within policymaking and organisational structures (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004), adding a compelling layer to the understanding of categorical violence. By embracing a narrowly framed 'theory of change' that directly links vocational training with employment and subsequently ties employment generation to peace, development agencies overlook the socio-political complexities within Sudan's labour regimes. This perspective disregards the historical continuity of violence in Sudan and fails to contextualise the overlapping forms of both visible physical, and subtle invisible, violence embedded within these structures. This categorical blindness—an unwillingness or inability to engage with the local complexities beyond standardised categories—results in development interventions that fail

to address the nuanced needs and experiences of the people they aim to serve. For rural Sudanese workers, especially those in marginalised ethnic and racial groups, this blindness translates into continued exclusion, as these interventions fail to challenge the existing power dynamics that shape labour regimes. Here, categorical violence manifests not only in the classifications that define who receives training or support but also in the very failure to question those classifications.

Contributions to Understanding Violence Beyond Physical Conflict

Finally, the thesis expands the concept of violence in labour regimes, connecting it to visible and invisible forms of harm. Drawing on theories of symbolic, structural and everyday violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004; Farmer et al. 2006; Galtung 1969b; Scheper-Hughes 1992), the research demonstrates that violence in labour regimes is not limited to physical coercion or visible bullying; it encompasses the deprivation, exclusion, and systematic devaluation embedded within categorisation itself. For rural workers in Sudan, this means that violence is often a matter of limited access, enforced dependency, and invisible constraints, rather than overt force. This broader understanding of violence, grounded in categorical violence, underscores that peacebuilding and development cannot succeed without addressing the structures of inequality embedded within labour systems. It suggests that rethinking development practice requires a critical examination of these categories, challenging the very assumptions that underpin peacebuilding interventions.

The Centrality of Family as Violence Mitigator and Enforcer

In conceptualising categorical violence, this thesis foregrounds the role of 'family' as both a mitigator and enforcer of violence within Sudan's labour regimes. Family is a multifaceted social institution where intersecting categories of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation converge, delineating the boundaries of labour access and shaping the conditions under which individuals can participate in or are excluded from certain forms of work. While families often serve as vital support structures, facilitating access to employment, they also reinforce traditional hierarchies through deeply embedded

expectations. For example, gendered labour roles, upheld by patriarchy and Arab-Islamic ideology, limit the agency of women and younger family members, limiting them to undervalued roles within the domestic sphere.

This thesis reveals that family dynamics mirror broader socio-political inequalities: just as societal categorisations marginalise certain groups, family-based hierarchies often replicate these patterns, normalising exploitation in the name of love, duty, or loyalty. Here, family becomes both a source of stability and a vehicle for reinforcing social and economic dependencies, illustrating the multifaceted nature of categorical violence. Through family, social classifications sustain and regenerate inequalities within rural labour regimes, highlighting the need for critical examination of not only public institutions but also private structures in understanding Sudan's labour landscape.

Visibility and Recognition

In examining Sudan's labour regimes, the theme of visibility reveals itself as a central mechanism through which categorical violence is enacted. Visibility determines which forms of labour gain recognition and whose experiences are acknowledged within economic frameworks. In this process, the boundaries of recognition are not neutral but shaped by social hierarchies of race, gender, and ethnicity, where some forms of labour are deemed worthy of attention, while others remain systematically hidden.

The concept of visibility is intrinsically linked to the injustice of being unrecognised. Our predisposition to rely on observable factors can blind us to the reality that exists beyond our assumptions. These findings also underline that the perpetuation and resurgence of violence within labour regime dynamics are intricate, variable, and intertwined with the manifold forms of violence inherent in our social existence.

Visibility within the framework of categorical violence sheds light on how classification systems determine whose labour is acknowledged and whose is obscured. By prioritising certain forms of work and worker categories, institutional practices create boundaries that, while highlighting some contributions, leave others in the shadows. For example, in Sudan's rural labour regimes, women's social reproductive labour is often rendered invisible despite

its essential role in the sustenance of capitalist life. This systemic omission results from a symbolic violence that links labour value to particular spaces such as public markets and urban settings, where formal wage labour is more visible and therefore more recognised.

Ultimately, visibility functions as a selective process that consolidates power by making unseen labour unaccounted for in both development metrics and policy frameworks. Addressing categorical violence within development thus requires expanding classifications to encompass the complex socio-economic realities that standardised categories tend to obscure, ensuring interventions genuinely reflect and respond to the needs of those currently left unrecognised.

8.2 Reflection on and Limitations of the Research

The objective of this research was to develop a nuanced understanding of everyday labour in rural labour regimes in Sudan, aiming to grasp individuals' perceptions of work, the complex motivations behind their decisions to engage in specific forms of labour, and to analyse how these insights intersect with institutional frameworks around VT/EG-centred peacebuilding initiatives. This deep insight into rural labour conditions also serves to assess how donor-led peacebuilding efforts, relying on vocational training and employment generation as pathways to peace, interact with and are informed by collected labour data. To achieve this, it was essential to adopt a methodology that would allow me to view labour regimes in a specific context through an intimate lens. Drawing inspiration from political economists Sender and Cramer (2022), who emphasise the significance of life histories in enriching survey findings, I also incorporated life history narratives from the inception of my research. This approach enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the interconnections between labour, family dynamics, the broader social fabric, and the persistence and regeneration of violence.

Through the application of the life history method, I began to discern the pivotal role of family within my research, an aspect I had not initially anticipated. While I recognised the significance of the social—encompassing factors such as gender, race, and ethnicity—in understanding labour markets (Fine 1998), I was unaware of the intricate interconnections between these social distinctions and the centrality of family. As I gradually recognised the

importance of family in shaping labour regime dynamics in the specific context of Sudan, and especially North Kordofan, I developed a keen interest in exploring how power is accumulated, consolidated, and expanded in the sphere of work by Sudanese families. Drawing on Mahmoud's (1984) observation that top capitalists in North Kordofan, including those in El-Rahad, solidify their influence and extend their businesses through matrimonial alliances, this inquiry explored how family events such as marriage, celebrated as emblematic of love and care, also emerge as potential contributors to the perpetuation of existing forms of violence.

In addition to employing in-depth qualitative research methods, such as life histories and ethnographic observation, I also sought to quantify certain insights I gathered, based on both surveys and interviews. While I hold reservations about methodologies that rely heavily on national surveys with limited regional accuracy, I recognise the persuasive impact of numerical visibility from a policymaker's standpoint. Where feasible, I integrated quantitative analysis, which brought fresh perspectives and findings to my study. For example, quantifying the wage disparity between genders enabled me to tangibly assess the extent of gender-based categorical inequality in wages. Additionally, without quantitative data, I would not have discovered that tea ladies often earn a noteworthy daily income compared to other job categories pursued by women, a finding that partially explains the consistent popularity of this occupation despite the harassment and poor reputation that tea ladies frequently endure.

While employing mixed methods facilitated a richer exploration of the data, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations inherent in quantifying certain types of information. The wage analysis, for instance, relied on participants' self-reported income and schedules, which I could verify only in limited instances. This self-reported nature of data introduces a degree of uncertainty, as there is no guarantee that participants provided fully accurate information. Moreover, income alone fails to encapsulate all forms of compensation received for labour. I encountered instances where shared meals and gift exchanges functioned as informal payment, but it was beyond the scope of this study to thoroughly analyse these informal compensatory practices across all participants. Moreover, while I recognised the importance of non-economic factors in understanding labour dynamics, such as the social support exchanged within labour networks, the non-tangible rewards

associated with these relationships were challenging to quantify within the study's parameters.

One limitation of this study concerns the relatively small sample size of El-Rahad interviewees involved in VT/EG initiatives. Although VT/EG initiatives were a component of this research, the primary focus remained understanding rural labour regimes and their socio-political context. Due to the temporary suspension of VT/EG programmes during the Revolution, the sample size for these participants was reduced. Nevertheless, the available data provided critical insights into the interaction between rural labour practices and policy-level interventions in Sudan.

Positionality presented a unique challenge throughout the research, compelling constant reflexivity on my role as both researcher and former development practitioner. My prior experience in development and conflict recovery may have influenced my interpretation of participants' experiences and labour choices. Embracing reflexivity as Geertz (1972) and Mwambari (2019) recommend, I actively questioned how my background might shape assumptions or create blind spots, especially in the interpretation of data linked to developmental interventions. Recognising this positionality was especially crucial when analysing issues of visibility and the exclusionary effects of classification in labour data. The concept of positionality also shaped my understanding of institutional blindness (Ferguson 1999; Mosse 2004), as I reflected on the extent to which my previous professional affiliations might predispose me toward certain assumptions about peacebuilding efficacy.

Finally, my insistence on conducting research in conflict-affected rural regions introduced a variety of security challenges stemming from the restricted access granted to foreigners in areas outside Khartoum during the Sudanese Revolution. Remaining in Khartoum would have enabled safer, more stable fieldwork, but I opted for field research in North Kordofan to directly observe the nuanced expressions of violence embedded within rural labour regimes. Moreover, because my research came to focus on expressions of violence within labour dynamics, including non-physical forms, conducting research in Khartoum would still have yielded equally valuable insights into manifestations of violence embedded in Sudan's labour practices and structures in urban contexts. Encountering Sudanese intelligence and security authorities, while challenging, ultimately enriched my fieldwork by providing insights into the motives and socio-political positioning of these coercive forces.

These limitations and reflections underscore the need for ongoing methodological flexibility and reflexivity when conducting research in dynamic and politically unstable environments. The complexities encountered serve as a reminder of the importance of recognising both the visible and invisible forces shaping labour dynamics and the embedded role of the researcher in understanding and interpreting these realities.

8.3 Recommendations and Future Research

8.3.1 Recommendations

In light of this study's findings, international development practitioners should reassess their conventional approaches to labour policy—particularly around how labour is classified, conceptualised, and valued, especially in rural contexts, and how unemployment is understood and addressed.

Improving data collection and analysis is critical to ensuring that rural labour dynamics are more accurately represented in Sudan's policy frameworks. In labour regimes like that of Sudan, where a significant number of workers are involved in agricultural and pastoral activities, capturing the nuances of seasonality in labour would allow for a much wider and more accurate understanding of these workers' livelihoods. Following international labour data standards is valuable for global comparison, yet developing methodologies that centre Sudanese labour patterns—rather than retrofitting them into frameworks designed for advanced economies—will provide a more meaningful and accurate foundation for policy development. Time-use studies, for instance, have proven useful in understanding how rural populations sustain themselves and could provide essential insights when conducted alongside standardised surveys. Similarly, recognising the central role of social reproductive labour within these contexts is overdue; without it, a complete view of rural labour regimes remains elusive.

In addition, VT/EG initiatives for peacebuilding require a critical review, as these often remain overly focused on supply-side interventions and rely on flawed assumptions embedded in traditional theories of change. This reassessment must account for the socio-political and historical factors shaping rural labour and the underlying structures that contribute to marginalisation and conflict.

To bridge the link between training and sustainable employment, this thesis highlights that, as Amsden (2010) suggests with the concept of "job dementia", initiatives without a robust focus on demand-side needs fall short of generating enduring employment opportunities. Effective employment generation interventions require an approach that not only builds skills but also addresses the demand-side, creating jobs that align with addressing root causes of violence from socio-political and historical perspectives.

In Sudan, access to labour is mediated by deeply entrenched categories—gender, ethnicity, race, and religion—that shape both the meaning and availability of work within rural labour regimes. This categorical violence obscures the contributions of many groups, limiting visibility and opportunity within labour markets. Practitioners must therefore incorporate an understanding of these dynamics into programme design, which would help to ensure equitable access to employment that extends beyond training alone.

For VT/EG to succeed as a long-term employment strategy, integration with demand-side interventions is crucial. For instance, while agencies such as the UNDP in Sudan have initiated employment-intensive programmes to stimulate job creation, these efforts face coordination challenges and often lack longevity. Similarly, JICA has engaged in initiatives supporting master craftsmen to expand both their hiring capacity and trainees' employment prospects post-training. These approaches highlight the potential for demand-side support but also underscore the need for deeper coordination and sustained focus on equitable, inclusive job creation. Additionally, these projects must be designed and implemented with a commitment to addressing the socio-political inequalities that perpetuate violence, ensuring that they contribute meaningfully to peace, justice, and systemic change within Sudan's labour landscape.

This research highlights how local NGOs, often invisible to international or Khartoum-based donors, are directly engaged with marginalised communities. During my fieldwork, I observed that these organisations, while working with minimal resources, were effectively meeting the urgent needs of their communities. This local expertise offers a compelling alternative for international development partnerships. However, recognising and collaborating with these NGOs requires development practitioners to critically reflect on their own positionality within Sudan's socio-political framework.

To truly enact meaningful change, international partners may need to challenge Sudanese officials, even if this risks straining government relationships. By confronting these dynamics, donors can discover more effective, alternative partners whose local insight and commitment directly address the needs of marginalised groups. However, because visibility is often tied to power, supporting these NGOs would likely involve facing resistance from governmental authorities, who may perceive such partnerships as a challenge to their influence. Ultimately, prioritising partnerships with impactful local actors over government-aligned entities requires aid agencies to make a deliberate choice, rooted in their commitment to tangible change and the long-term welfare of Sudan's most vulnerable communities.

If aid distribution remains limited to government channels—especially where these governments are known to perpetuate violence against marginalised groups—the international community must critically consider suspending support until viable alternatives are developed. Rather than relying solely on the appeal of established frameworks, international donors should recognise that creating alternative approaches may take time and involve addressing underlying issues that are not immediately visible to external observers. This slower, reflective approach, however, is essential to ensure that aid is genuinely aligned with equitable, long-term change.

The allocation of budgets for peacebuilding projects often hinges on perceived levels of urgency, which can inadvertently distort priorities by favouring high-visibility interventions over deeper, contextually grounded approaches. Projects designed to address visible aspects of conflict or immediate suffering may capture donor interest more readily, whereas initiatives aimed at supporting individuals whose suffering or involvement in conflict is less apparent might struggle to attract sufficient resources. While high-visibility interventions may be beneficial in raising awareness and donor support, if they unintentionally reinforce harmful power structures or misdirect resources, they risk further marginalising those most in need of support. International development agencies must, therefore, remain vigilant against letting urgency-driven funding shape their perception and response, asking whether short-term pressures are overshadowing opportunities for more sustained, impactful change. If assistance inadvertently legitimises power structures that perpetuate violence,

the accountability should ultimately lie with both the implementing agencies and their supporting ministries.

To ensure a more nuanced understanding of local dynamics, policymakers would greatly benefit from engaging with academics deeply familiar with Sudan's labour structures and socio-political landscape. Academic collaboration can contribute critical context, challenge entrenched policy assumptions, and introduce alternative perspectives that are often overlooked. Establishing academia-policy partnerships at both the project design and evaluation stages, as well as integrating academic insights into preparatory training for international practitioners, can deepen understanding of the complexities at hand. This dialogue is essential to prevent the inadvertent perpetuation of systemic violence through well-intentioned interventions. A collaborative, informed approach will help ensure that aid interventions contribute to positive, sustainable change.

8.3.2 Future Research

Building on this study's findings, future research could deepen our understanding of the intersection between categorical violence and labour regimes by exploring several critical themes. First, an investigation into how issues of categorical violence within labour relations and labour regimes have (or have not) been addressed in post-Sudan Revolution transitional discussions could be insightful. Although the transitional process following the 2019 Sudanese Revolution has been widely studied by scholars and policymakers (Afriyie 2024; Ali, Ben Hammou, and Powell 2022; Ali and Kazemi 2023; Bishai 2023; El-Battahani 2023; Manfredi Firmian and Mirghani 2022; Perthes 2024; Sharfi 2024), the focus has largely centred on political and democratic transitions, along with the actions of military actors and international organisations surrounding the outbreak of war in April 2024 (Ali et al. 2022; Manfredi Firmian and Mirghani 2022; Perthes 2024), while labour issues have remained underexplored. El-Battahani (2023:21) provides one of the few relevant references by noting youth demands for employment during this period. Future research could address this gap by examining the relative neglect of labour issues, situating them within broader human rights, equality, and non-discrimination frameworks in Sudan's transitional processes.

A promising approach would be to analyse both the Sudanese Revolution and the outbreak of war on 15 April 2023 from a categorical violence perspective, as well as situating these forms of violence within the evolving dynamics of labour regimes. While these two events differ in nature, they each created unique labour opportunities, intricately tied to Sudan's socio-political hierarchies. Ali and Kazemi (2023) identify a shift in Sudan's peripheries after the overthrow of El-Bashir, in which identity-based militias (ethnic, clan, and communal) now account for over 60% of political violence, compared to only 3% from traditional rebel groups. My own research explored the recruitment practices of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), emphasising family ties as a central factor (Section 4.6.3). For many within the RSF, joining is not just a job but an extension of family and social identity, as the RSF's reach often extends through kin networks. Recognising fighting as a form of labour, future investigations could explore how recruitment into groups like the RSF—and other localised militias—draws on the social meanings of labour within labour regime dynamics. These forms of work are bound to the family-based and social structures that define them, where fighting becomes not only an economic activity but a form of social belonging and kin responsibility. This intersection between family and labour highlights how involvement in conflict may carry deeper implications for fighters, beyond income generation, shaping their sense of duty and identity within the RSF's family-linked networks.

Another possible approach could explore how civilian workspaces adapted in response to the 15 April conflict, revealing new roles and adaptations within labour regimes deeply affected by multiple layers of violence. In Khartoum, specific work demands arose directly from the instability: tuk-tuk drivers began offering services such as retrieving belongings or checking on properties for those who had fled, while bus and taxi drivers, involved in human mobility, capitalised on the demand for safe passage, charging high rates to help evacuate residents. These adaptations underscore how workers, in response to conflict, leveraged the unique needs of their environment, sometimes blending economic opportunity with survival.

In parallel, social reproduction and family labour took on a heightened significance, bringing visibility to the risks women face in accessing essential goods such as water and food. These efforts often put women in vulnerable situations, where they experienced rape, sexual harassment, and violence, illustrating how conflict intensifies the stakes of otherwise

routine tasks. This adaptive shift raises crucial questions about who has to transform their labour practices in response to conflict-driven challenges. It also highlights how certain types of work—particularly those in informal and domestic spheres—remain hidden from view, with the abuses women face frequently occurring out of sight. This invisibility complicates both recognition and redress, underscoring the need for a closer examination of these often-unseen dimensions of labour, where the boundary between economic survival and social risk becomes dangerously blurred.

The final recommendation for future research lies in investigating the relationship between visibility, power, and access to external aid in conflict settings. Visibility often determines who receives international support, and the Sudanese conflict starkly reveals whose suffering is amplified and whose struggles remain invisible. This disparity became clear as the war unfolded, with those who could afford internet access or who had connections abroad—often via family members—being able to raise awareness and secure additional support, whereas those without these resources, particularly in rural areas with limited electricity or internet access, faced near-total isolation from external attention and assistance.

This visibility gap reflects a broader social dynamic within Sudan, where family ties play a crucial role in determining support, particularly from the diaspora. Even progressive members of the diaspora, many of whom contributed to the overthrow of El-Bashir in 2019, tended to prioritise aid for family members who were already better positioned to escape, whether to Egypt or the Gulf states. Meanwhile, communities in regions such as rural Kordofan, including El-Rahad, remained largely unheard, with sporadic updates only reaching the international community through IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Sudan Flash Alerts on attack-induced displacement cases. In contrast, narratives from more central areas, such as those involving Northern Riverain communities in Khartoum, were more likely to surface on social media, capturing greater visibility within the broader narratives of suffering. This discrepancy in visibility underscores how structural inequalities influence whose stories receive attention and resources, shaping the very allocation of external support.

The effects of this visibility gap on aid allocation are significant: both Sudanese and international assistance tend to cluster around those who can be 'seen', creating an

inherent inequality in relief efforts. This phenomenon calls for further research into how visibility, amplified or constrained by socio-economic and technological factors, shapes who receives aid in conflict zones and reinforces broader dynamics of categorical violence. Understanding this interplay between visibility and aid distribution will be essential to ensuring that assistance reaches those most in need, not just those most able to make their voices heard.

8.4 Contributions

In framing categorical violence as a multidimensional mechanism that reproduces inequality within Sudan's rural labour regimes, this thesis contributes theoretically, empirically, and practically to the fields of violence studies and labour studies. By situating categorical violence within a continuum of interpersonal, symbolic, structural, and institutional violence, it challenges conventional conceptions of violence as solely physical, expanding the analysis to include historical and socio-political constraints on agency.

Developing Categorical Violence as a Multilevel Theoretical Framework

This thesis bridges and extends labour and violence studies by examining how classifications of labour, valuation, and access to employment within Sudan's rural settings create entrenched patterns of violence. Drawing on structural (Farmer, 1996; Galtung, 1969), cultural (Galtung, 1990), and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001), the framework of categorical violence exposes how socio-political classifications rooted in race, gender, and ethnicity are not merely organisational tools but mechanisms that constrain individual potential, perpetuate social stratification, and limit access to economic mobility. By conceptualising classifications as forms of violence, this study challenges the assumption that labour categories are neutral, illustrating instead that these fixed roles restrict agency and often devalue individuals, locking them into positions of systemic disadvantage.

The thesis advances the works of Foucault (1973) on the role of classifications and Tilly's (1999) concept of categorical inequality by proposing categorical violence as a critical framework for understanding how exploitation, exclusion, and social invisibility operate

within labour regimes. The concept expands on Tilly's idea of inequality by framing these systemic harms within a continuum of visible and invisible violence that shapes labour regimes and broader social relations in conflict-affected developing settings. This research calls for a reconceptualisation of peacebuilding efforts, critiquing rigid development frameworks that oversimplify labour dynamics and overlook the socio-historical complexities influencing these regimes. By linking exclusion and misrecognition with wider forms of invisible violence, categorical violence provides a lens for critiquing peacebuilding and development models that fail to address the interwoven structural, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of violence embedded in labour regimes.

Interrogating the Labour-Violence Nexus

This study challenges the simplistic narrative that links unemployment to violence by foregrounding the socio-political dynamics embedded in Sudan's labour regimes. By examining labour not as isolated transactions but as relationally embedded practices, it highlights the interplay of historical, family-based, socio-political, and institutional forces shaping access to employment. Unlike traditional frameworks that view violence in terms of physical harm, the thesis reframes violence as an outcome of the symbolic and structural exclusion and devaluation perpetuated through categorical inequality. This approach aligns with heterodox perspectives (Cramer, 2010; Enria, 2018) that question the selective application of human capital, rational choice, and macroeconomic theories to interpret violence. It supports the view that peace depends not solely on employment but on the deeper structures of labour relations and regimes, which are shaped by the historical, social, economic, and political contexts of labour.

Contributions to Understanding Classification and Access in Labour Regimes

By exploring classification and access within Sudan's labour regimes, this research highlights often-overlooked dimensions in labour studies. It exposes the limitations of defining labour solely through wage metrics or productivity, revealing the value systems that shape work categories and labour access based on social hierarchies. This thesis thus challenges

standardised definitions of employment by introducing a nuanced view of access, where job opportunities are mediated through family networks and socio-political affiliations, reinforcing patriarchal and ethnic hierarchies. The concept of categorical violence unearths how these invisible boundaries in labour markets structure labour dynamics in Sudan, where formal and informal classifications determine who works, under what conditions, and how they are valued.

In the labour regime approach, analyses by Burawoy (1985) and Wells (1996) provide valuable insights into recruitment practices, particularly in their focus on broader structural mechanisms within labour markets. While Wells examined recruitment through personalised networks, particularly to address employer costs, this thesis offers a new perspective on the dynamic interactions between jobseekers and employers. By foregrounding family as a central mediating institution, the study introduces an in-depth focus on how family structures influence access, rather than recruitment alone (Bair 2019), and shape broader dynamics of labour opportunities in rural Sudanese contexts. Consequently, the study identified ‘family’ as a central social institution that, through varied socio-political networks, exerts a major influence over access dynamics, shaping the perpetuation and renewal of violence within labour regimes.

Expanding Development and Policy Perspectives on VT/EG Initiatives

This study critiques VT/EG-centred peacebuilding models by examining them as social practices shaped by institutional biases and entrenched social hierarchies. Through a comparative approach, it highlights how international aid, reliant on rigid classifications, often overlooks the socio-political realities of labour in developing countries, especially rural labour, inadvertently entrenching inequalities rather than mitigating them. The emphasis on vocational training as the primary route to employment reflects what Amsden (2010) calls “job dementia”—the tendency to focus on skills supply without addressing demand-side constraints. The study thus contributes a framework for re-evaluating development and peacebuilding interventions, advocating for more context-sensitive programming that addresses the labour market’s structural limitations.

Contributions to Understanding Development Projects as Socially Embedded Labour

This research introduces a novel perspective on VT/EG programmes by examining them not just as interventions but also as socially embedded acts within broader institutional dynamics. Moving beyond standard input-output evaluations, this thesis frames the design and delivery of these projects as influenced by the socio-political hierarchies and assumptions of implementing stakeholders. By focusing on how personal experiences and dominant theoretical logics shape implementation, this research highlights that development programmes often mirror the perspectives of those in power (Ferguson 1999; Foucault 1973), potentially reinforcing rather than reducing inequalities. This approach reveals that development practices are not neutral and that outcomes are significantly shaped by interactions and power dynamics within implementing organisations.

Reconceptualising project implementation as a form of labour embedded in social contexts, this study provides development practitioners with a critical framework to recognise how structural inequalities and institutional blindness (Mosse 2004) can persist through development work. This approach encourages a reassessment of project design that includes reflections on positionality (Mwambari 2019), aiming to more authentically represent and engage with the social realities—including their own—within the environments they seek to transform.

Foregrounding Visibility as a Critical Dimension of Labour and Aid

Visibility is shown to be a powerful mechanism in determining who benefits from development aid and who remains unseen. By examining the invisibility of rural labour, particularly social reproductive labour, the thesis exposes how categorical violence obscures the work of marginalised groups within policy frameworks. This research extends the discourse on visibility by revealing the ways in which aid flows align with social hierarchies, privileging those whose suffering is seen and measurable while marginalising those whose contributions remain hidden. In challenging the bias toward visible indicators in aid allocation, this thesis calls for an expansion of data collection to capture the full spectrum of labour, advocating for a recognition of those excluded by current systems of classification.

In essence, this thesis underscores the need for a visibility-sensitive, relational approach to understanding labour dynamics and violence in conflict-affected Sudan (and similar regions). It highlights how categorical violence, deeply embedded in Sudan's historical, socio-economic, and political fabric, perpetuates systemic inequalities and challenges development interventions to address the root causes of marginalisation rather than simply respond to its visible symptoms.

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Appendix 1 Socio-Economic Profiles of El-Rahad Villages and El-Rahad Town Neighbourhoods

1.1 El-Rahad North

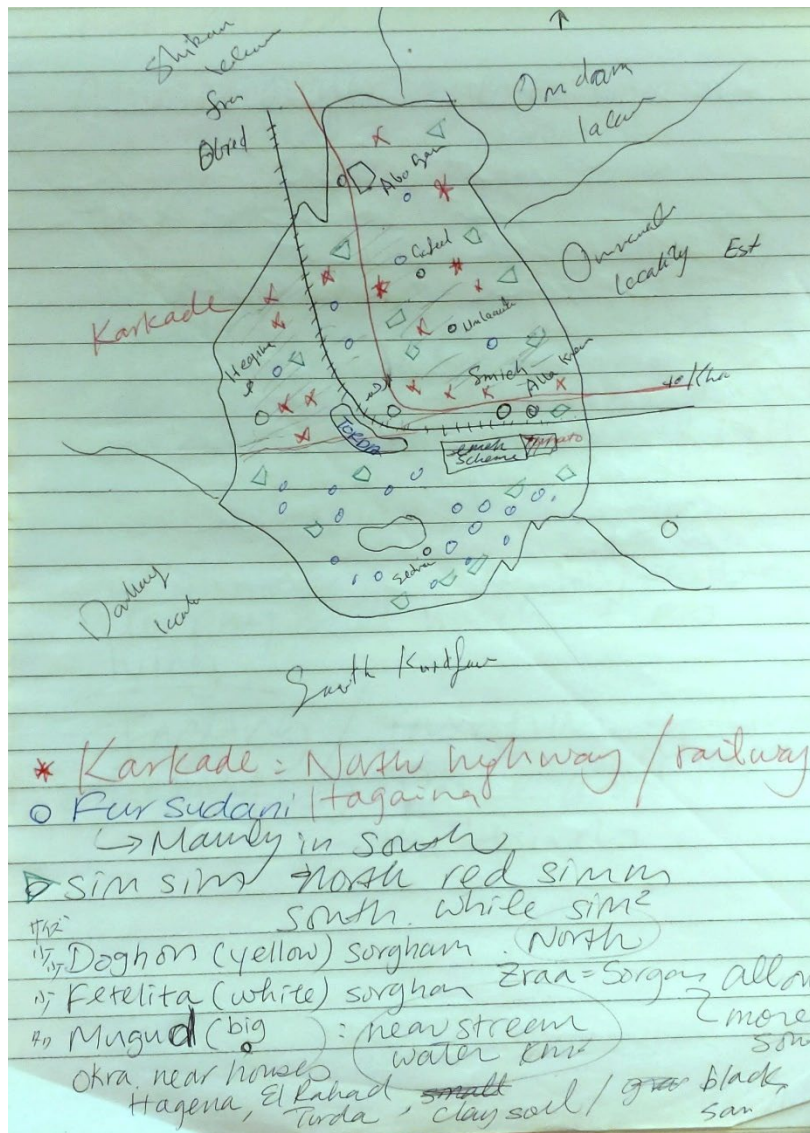
El-Rahad North is the driest of the administrative units within the El-Rahad locality. Its soil is predominantly reddish-brown sand, and water is scarcest in the northern region, where residents often recount arduous journeys lasting hours to access water sources. The majority of El-Rahad North's population identifies ethnically as Gawamaa and Shanabla. Only the northern part of the El-Obeid-El-Rahad highway, where El-Rahad North begins in El-Rahad Town, is associated with the Dar Hamid tribe.¹⁶⁹

In El-Obeid, a Kababish man, whose second wife is Dar Hamid, takes great pride in celebrating his wife's tribe as “the purest Arab”.¹⁷⁰ The Gawamaa community primarily engages in farming, while the Shanabla people are predominantly animal herders, particularly camels. Traditional rain-fed farming methods persist in this area, albeit with the introduction of some tractors through an export-oriented agricultural development project funded by IFAD. Their primary cash crops are sesame (though of a less expensive red variety due to the poor soil quality), hibiscus, yellow sorghum (*doghon*), and *zraa* sorghum, as shown in Figure 21 below.

¹⁶⁹ Interview, Hakim, 26/8/2019.

¹⁷⁰ Interview, Abdullah, 19/2/2019. Kababish is an Arab tribe who are more prominent in the northern section of North Kordofan state.

Figure 20. Agricultural Production Map of the El-Rahad Locality



Residents of El-Rahad Town often discuss the affluence of men in the northern region who possess a substantial number of goats. These goats are typically kept domestically along with chickens and do not migrate. There are also substantial numbers of camels, mostly owned by nomadic Shanabla, as well as sheep owned by various groups.

Camels, in particular, require a nomadic lifestyle as they need a constant supply of vegetation, and generally range from South Kordofan to Soderi, located in the northwest corner of North Kordofan state. The Kordofan region boasts multiple migration routes, with camels moving along one pre-sown with jez, a special wheat variety for camels (possibly also for other animals).

In the northern areas, there are goats, sheep, and camels. Sheep are more prevalent in dry, sandy terrains such as El-Rahad North, primarily because their feet are susceptible to fungal infections in muddier soils, which are more abundant in El-Rahad South.

According to a Gawamaa expert on animal husbandry in El-Rahad Town, the sedentary Shanabla in El-Rahad North inhabit forested areas. Camel herders (Abbala), whose camels are known for entering farms during the night and causing significant crop damage, are often described as “mostly armed and have killed farmers”.¹⁷¹

Other Gawamaa residents of El-Rahad Town depict the Shanabla as a community that prioritises their camels over their own children.¹⁷² In the northern region, farms are typically family-owned and operate on a smaller scale. The average agricultural plot in the north varies in size, ranging from 5 to 50 *mokhamas* (8.75 to 87.5 acres).

1.1.1 Um Laota

Um Laota is a rural village situated roughly 43 kilometres to the north of El-Rahad Town. Upon leaving the El-Obeid-El-Rahad highway, there are no paved roads leading to Um Laota. Instead, one must follow animal tracks and occasionally rely on passing trucks to navigate. The journey by car from El-Rahad Town to Um Laota typically takes about two hours.

Um Laota is home to approximately 600 residents, all belonging to the Gawamaa community. They claim a shared ancestry traced back to a common great-great-grandfather. There is no school in the village, but there is a mosque and a shop as well as residential units (Figure 21). The majority of Um Laota's residents are engaged in farming, with sesame serving as a primary cash crop. In 2019, IFAD was executing a rural development initiative aimed at enhancing sesame production productivity by promoting the use of tractors.

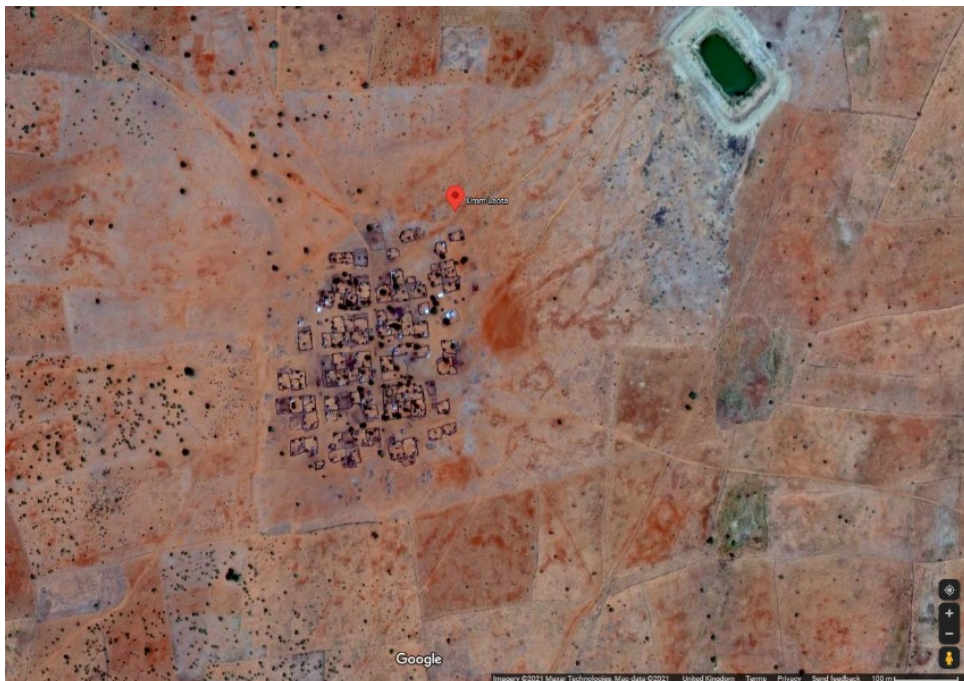
In addition to their agricultural activities, women in Um Laota cultivate vegetables in their home gardens (known as *gibraka*), primarily for family consumption. However, a recent development has seen them venture into selling some of these vegetables at weekly markets. During the dry season, the men from this village migrate to Khartoum, where they

¹⁷¹ Interview, Mohamed, 1/9/2019.

¹⁷² Chat, Fadwa, 13/9/2019.

work as wage labourers. Notably, one individual secured a job as a construction worker in Saudi Arabia during the dry season. To obtain this opportunity, he had to engage the services of a relative working in an employment agency. Another rare profession found in this village was that of nurse. During the rainy season, she returns to Um Laota to cultivate her land for sesame production.

Figure 21. Satellite Image of Um Laota



Source: Google map

1.2 El-Rahad West

The western part of El-Rahad locality is intersected by several seasonal rivers known as *khors*, which enable flood-based garden farming in El-Rahad West. These khors contribute to moister soil compared to the sandy northern areas, with a higher percentage of *gerdud*, a local term describing soil that is a blend of clay and sand. Residents engage in flood-based garden farming (FEWS Net 2013:9), cultivating a variety of vegetables and fruits, including well-known produce such as lemons, tomatoes, spring onions, guavas, mangos, okra, and rocket (arugula). As illustrated in Figure 23 below, the flood-farming areas exhibit lush greenery. Beyond flood-based farming, field-based agriculture is also practiced, with crops

such as sesame, hibiscus, yellow sorghum, white sorghum (referred to as *fetelita*), and zraa sorghum. Additionally, *mugud* sorghum is cultivated near the khors.

In El-Rahad West, land is owned by different groups. Some of the oldest tribes, including the Musabaat and Gellaba Hawara, who have now settled in the urban area of El-Obeid, own substantial amounts of land, along with some Gawamaa landlords. In the southwest of El-Rahad West, more of the landlords are Baggara as the area gets closer to El-Fula, the capital of West Kordofan state, known as Dar Baggara. The Baggara in this area are mostly Messiria and Hawazma.

In the western area known as Abu Algor, is a designated cattle resting place known as a *makhraf*. During the migration season, the Baggara and their cattle spend some time in these makhrafs before returning to South Kordofan in October as the rainy season comes to an end.

1.2.1 Hageina

Hageina is situated approximately 20 kilometres to the west and slightly north of El-Rahad Town. The name derives from the term 'injection', as it is the place where water is 'injected' into the seasonal river, or khor, of Abu Haber. These seasonal rivers make up approximately 40% of the White Nile's water supply. While there are occasional patches of sandy terrain, the predominant soil type in Hageina is gerdud.

Hageina is one of the larger villages in the western part of the El-Rahad locality with an estimated population of around 4,000 and a weekly market on Thursdays. Hageina has two distinct agricultural seasons. Summer (March to June) is dedicated to garden farming, while autumn (June to September) is the season for field farming, growing crops like sorghum, groundnut, sesame, beans, peanuts, and hibiscus. From September to March, the region enters the 'off season', during which many young men migrate to other agricultural areas or cities in search of work opportunities.

Hageina's origins date back to the 15th century when Kordofan served as a 'buffer zone' between the influential kingdoms of Funj and Darfur. In 1925, a man named Mustafa, a

former Mahdist fighter, was granted ownership of this village.¹⁷³ In order of population, Hageina's ethnic composition is Jallaba Hawara, Ghodiat, Musabaat, Bedariya, Gawamaa, and Dinka. Interestingly, many Hageina landlords live in urban centres such as El-Obeid, Bara, or El-Rahad. This landlord class originates from groups such as the Jaalyin, Jallaba Hawara and Bedariya.

Hageina has separate middle schools for boys and girls. While the high school is primarily for boys, it accepts girls who wish to pursue further education. Remarkably, some girls in the village make journeys of over ten kilometres on foot to attend school. Notably, one of these schools owes its existence to funding from a Koz, a wealthy NCP supporter.

However, the village faces persistent challenges related to water and electricity, as there is no public infrastructure. In the village's central market area, two tailors use a petrol generator to supply electricity for their sewing machines. Organised transportation is also limited, with only occasional weekend services available for residents who wish to travel to El-Rahad and back.

¹⁷³ Interview, Sheikh Yahya, 17/2/2019.

Figure 22. Satellite Image of Hageina



Source: Google map

1.3 El-Rahad East

In El-Rahad East, the soil transitions from gerdud to a clay-like texture, particularly in the southern areas, where it takes on a much darker, nearly black hue, as seen in Figure 24 below. The fertile gerdud soil has attracted substantial agricultural investment, and its proximity to the White Nile and Gezira region prompted the British colonial administration, in collaboration with Sudanese partners primarily from Northern Riverain tribes, to establish the Sumayh Irrigation Scheme for cotton production.

Figure 23. Satellite Image of Sumayh



Source: Google map

Located three kilometres east of Sumayh is Allah Kareem, renowned for its organised tomato growing, primarily undertaken by Hausa, 'West African', farmers. In addition to cotton and tomatoes, the eastern region also cultivates white sesame, sunflowers, peanuts, zraa sorghum, and mugud sorghum.

The agricultural season in this region begins towards the end of September for cotton and December for tomatoes, offering seasonal wage employment in traditional rain-fed agriculture. Villages are strategically positioned along the Kosti-El-Rahad-El-Obeid highway, railway, and the seasonal khor or river.

The majority of El-Rahad East residents are Gawamaa, although some Fallata and Hausa have also actively participated in these agricultural schemes. Notably, in the southern part of the eastern area, cattle farming is prevalent, while the northern part is known for a higher concentration of sheep.

1.3.1 Sumayh

Sumayh, a medium-sized rural commercial centre, is located 20 kilometres east of El-Rahad Town along the El-Rahad-Kosti highway. The southern side of Sumayh is bordered by the khor, where flood irrigation is employed in the cultivation of cotton, tomatoes, sorghum, and sunflowers. Sumayh has two distinct agricultural seasons: from mid-August to March for cotton, and after March and before mid-August for all other crops.

Before the British colonial era, Sumayh primarily cultivated yellow sorghum. The British introduced cotton cultivation to the area after noticing its fertile soil and rich water resources. In 1946, the British Army supervised the construction of the irrigation scheme, and by the 1950s, Sumayh predominantly produced cotton. An *Omda*, a mid-level traditional leader, reminisced about the British era, saying, “it was better before. There was even a telephone in the middle of the field”.¹⁷⁴

Today, approximately 4,000 acres of land are dedicated to cotton cultivation, with some areas still reserved for *doraa* sorghum production. A significant portion of the land is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture in Khartoum. The management of cotton production is facilitated through a commercial company that provides microfinance to farmers. The average land size for cotton cultivation in Sumayh is six *feddans* (10 mokhamas or 2.5 hectares). The use of the feddan as the land measurement unit, distinct from the more popular mokhama used in western Sudan, indicates the influence of outside farmers, such as those from northern and central Sudan, or Khartoum-based organisations operating in this area.

Sumayh has an old cotton processing factory, established by an Egyptian and northern Sudanese-owned company, as well as a new one built using investment from an influential supporter of the NCP. Cotton produced in Sumayh is exported to various international destinations, including China, Egypt, India, and Bangladesh. The village serves as a significant hub for agricultural trading in the locality, with *doraa*, sesame, peanuts, and cotton arriving from nearby villages.

¹⁷⁴ Interview, Sheikh Sajid, 12/9/2019.

For sesame, which commands higher prices in urban markets, farmers often make the journey themselves to El-Rahad to sell. Sumayh also hosts a weekly market, primarily dedicated to the trading of animals. Approximately 200 sheep are traded each week. The village is home to a diverse range of livestock, including donkeys, cattle, camels, goats, sheep, and chickens. Interestingly, an Omda claims that donkeys outnumber all other animals in the area.¹⁷⁵

According to the traditional leader, Sumayh's 'official' population is 1,300 residents, but due to the influx of IDPs and other migrant workers, the population is more likely to be 16,000 to 17,000.¹⁷⁶ Sumayh is connected to other South Kordofan villages by road, and in 2014, IDPs from Abu Kershola in South Kordofan sought refuge in Sumayh. Many of them later relocated to Allah Karim and El-Rahad Town in pursuit of wage employment. According to the Gawamaa Omda, the Sumayh population is composed of 98% Gawamaa, 1% Hausa, and 1% Baggara. However, observations suggest that the area may be more diverse in terms of its ethnic composition.

1.4 El-Rahad South

El-Rahad South boasts seasonal rivers and the man-made lake of El-Torda, making it the most water-rich area in the locality. Further south, the landscape features Dair Mountain, with an elevation of 1,450 metres. Streams flow from the mountain's summit, and it is said that some SPLM fighters operate from this location.

The soil in this region is predominantly gerdud but exhibits characteristics closer to clay; it is almost black and has a rich mineral content. This clayey soil has attracted significant large-scale agricultural investments, often from Northern Riverain traders. These farms are notable for their substantial size, measured in feddans, as in El-Rahad East. Farming in the south is intensive and predominantly relies on mechanised techniques due to the hardness of the soil. Groups of men stay in camp-like settings, working day and night.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In this southern region, the primary crops cultivated include peanuts, sesame, and gum arabic. Due to the muddier soil, particularly during the rainy season, transportation is largely reliant on tractors, and access is limited. The area also features extensive forests, and people's livelihoods often involve the sale of trees to the government.

In El-Rahad South, ethnic groups, such as the Hawazma and Messiria of the Baggara, Nuba, and Mussalamiya, are prominent. In terms of animals, cattle are the most popular due to the availability of water and muddier soil, which explains the prominence of the Baggara group.

Due to its proximity to conflict-ridden South Kordofan, the Sudanese army maintains a presence along the road in El-Rahad South. The security situation in the southern part of El-Rahad is particularly precarious, making travel to this region challenging. Consequently, I was unable to visit this area. However, my host family in El-Rahad were farmers actively engaged in agriculture in El-Rahad South, and they provided valuable insights into the labour organisation and socio-economic dynamics of this region.