I, Michelle Lohmann, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

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Redefining Conflict: How Exploring Women's Narratives Complicates Darfur, Rape, and Gendered Positionalities

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Redefining Conflict: How Exploring Women’s Narratives Complicates Darfur, Rape, and Gendered Positionalities

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the narratives of Darfuri women and their experiences of the Sudanese conflict. A feminist theoretical perspective was utilized to explore the workings of gender within the narratives and to examine how privileging women’s voices might produce new insights regarding the conflict. Analytic work demonstrated complex interactions between agency and victimization and control and resistance throughout the narratives, contributing to a more complicated and complete understanding of the conflict and of Darfuri women.
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References
Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Conceptualization and Topic Justification

According to Harding (1987), feminist research begins with an inquiry into what appears problematic from the perspective of women’s experiences. That inquiry informed the genesis of this project, and led me to consider the current crisis in Sudan, specifically in Darfur. The civil war raging in Sudan and the resulting systematic violence, specifically the rape of Darfuri women, is one of the most flagrant violations of human rights happening today, but it has received relatively little global priority or intervention. Named a genocide by the United States government and the International Criminal Court, the conflict has destroyed hundreds of villages, displaced more than 2.7 million people, and caused the deaths of somewhere between 200,000 to 400,000 people (Physicians for Human Rights, 2009).

Much literature has concluded that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and militarism; their bodies become the symbolic and physical site of warfare between men and nations (see Mayer, 2000). Darfur is no exception. The Darfuri conflict is characterized by the widespread and systematic use of rape to terrorize and demoralize Darfuri communities (Martin, 2007). According to the U.N. organization, Stop Rape Now, an estimate of the number of rapes that have occurred in Darfur is nearly impossible to determine, however the number is thought to be in the thousands, with hundreds more occurring each day (“Stop Rape Now,” 2010).
Overall, national and international efforts to address the violence in Darfur have been insufficient. Sudanese government officials actively resist and threaten humanitarian and international aid agencies, they fail to prevent rapes and attacks, and they fail to assist survivors despite claims to the contrary (Martin, 2007). Perpetrators enjoy almost complete impunity. Humanitarian agencies and other international organizations often lack the resources, size, and influence to truly help Darfuri women. Even when assistance or treatment is available, many women are reluctant to seek care (IRIN, 2004). The conflict is far from over, and as each day passes, the number of deaths, refugees, attacks, and rapes continues to climb. Furthermore, despite the critical and multifaceted ways that Darfuri women are embroiled in this conflict, their voices are either absent from national and international discourses regarding the conflict or are confined to subject positions of victimization (Kothari, 2008).

The timeliness and urgency of the situation in itself provides justification for attention and analysis of Darfur and the experiences of Darfuri women. In addition to its horrific physical consequences, the conflict has ideological, symbolic, and gendered implications. Therefore, the conflict not only necessitates attention for its material consequences, but also provides a rich site for academic analysis and deconstruction of discourses of power, ideology, gender, and hegemony that are at work beneath the surface.

Consistent with the observations articulated above, my project broadly focuses on the communicative construction of social reality, where the previously mentioned discourses of gender and power are constantly created, maintained,
challenged, and enacted through and by communicative processes, particularly, narrative processes. More specifically, I use a critical feminist lens to examine the complex relationships of gender and power within the Darfuri conflict. Working under the feminist assumption that women's realities have been socially and historically unknown, ignored, or marginalized in some way, this paper particularly focuses on the narratives of Darfuri women embroiled in the national conflict. I explore narrative content, audience influence, and context. I also examine the underlying workings of gender, power, and silence; and thus the meanings they produce or reproduce. The literature I review is situated to examine how nationalism is related to the symbolization, creation, and recreation of gendered constructions of masculinity and femininity, and how it may have contributed to gendered violence in militarized national conflict. Additionally, I examine how gendered constructions position women in passive, silenced positions in war and national roles, leading to an inaccurate and incomplete understanding of international politics. Overall, my project explores the ways the Darfuri women’s narratives both reflect and affect how these constructions, processes, and physical consequences are made, maintained, reproduced, and remade, or challenged.

This project proposes to not only use a critical feminist lens to examine the narratives of Darfuri women’s experiences, but by privileging feminine voices and experiences in general, this project adds to a more complete understanding of the conflict and the women’s identities. My project recognizes a critical need to acknowledge the agency and value of all individuals, regardless of gender, race, nationality, and so on. Consequently, my project offers both academic and practical
contributions. Along with identifying ways in which dominant discursive paradigms silence and oppress certain populations, namely women, within the situated contexts of the Darfuri conflict, the thesis also explores the ways in which the voices of Darfuri women may subvert this dominant paradigm, thereby adding to existing critical, feminist, and interpretive literature. Additionally, I believe that much of the current research and media attention regarding Darfur is quantitative, statistical, militarism-focused, or sensationalized, which decreases the Darfuri women's voices and agency to an even greater extent. By utilizing a case-based, qualitative, and interpretative methodology, my project attempts to address this gap in the research.

Furthermore, as knowledge and dialogue are always the beginning steps of (re)constituting change, transformation, and empowerment, I harbor hopes that this paper might contribute to a more complete dialogue regarding Darfuri women, and a broader dialogue regarding social justice. My project’s role, however small, in enhancing and complicating social understandings of the conflict and women’s roles within these contexts, might influence future interventions, solutions, and rebuilding processes to be considered and enacted in more balanced and liberatory ways.

Finally, my reasons for undertaking this research topic are personal as well. As a female student, I have maintained a consistent academic and personal interest in feminist literature, research, methodologies, and goals. Moreover, I have recently begun to consider the unique oppression some women face as a result of intersecting facets of their identities, such as gender, race, class, nationality, etc. On another note, I have been horrified at the atrocities happening in Sudan and to the
Darfuri women, and at the lack of international intervention. Therefore, this research topic originates from an intersection of my academic and personal interests, from international crisis and critical feminist theory, and from silence and voice. In sum, my goals for this project rest upon privileging women’s voices, and in doing so, exploring the ways in which their narratives enhance, complicate, and challenge understandings of the Darfuri conflict, their roles within the conflict, and gendered social relationships and possibilities for social change in general.

**Background of the Darfuri Conflict**

In order to situate my project’s goals within material contexts, as well as within extant literature and research, a more expansive background of the conflict’s political and historical background is warranted. In particular, my project recognizes the ways in which situated contexts both constrain and enable discursive actions available in given situations. Therefore, a contextual grounding is a particularly significant and useful foregrounding to any analysis or literature review. A general overview of the conflict is provided subsequently and referenced throughout the remaining project.

Sudan is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world, although it is often categorized into a simplistic African/Arab dualism. Geographically, it is the largest country in Africa, surrounded by ten neighbors – Egypt, Libya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Chad, and the Central African Republic. Much of Sudan’s internal ethnic configurations reflect the positioning of these neighbors (Deng, 2006). Sudan’s population is comprised of approximately fifty ethnic groups that can be further
divided into nearly six hundred subgroups. Overall, these groups can be divided into three main categorizations: Northern Arabs, who are actually of a mixed African-Arab descent, the non-Arab groups in the North, who are influenced by the Arab culture to a degree, but have retained their indigenous identity, and the Southern groups, who are the most indigenously African in race and culture (Deng, 2006).

While diversity can be a source of enrichment and progress, it has historically been a source of conflict and suffering for the Sudanese people. The current conflict in Darfur is merely the latest struggle in a long series of domestic wars that have plagued the country since 1955 (Deng, 2006). The conflicts that have raged in Sudan are not merely due to ethnic differences, but conflicts over sharing power, wealth, services, development, and rights. Overall, the South has traditionally been the most marginalized and discriminated region in the country (Deng, 2006).

The current Islamic regime is headed by Omar al-Bashir, who came to power in 1989 after leading a military coup. Under this regime, women’s rights have steadily deteriorated. At its inception many women were dismissed from various civil service positions, and new “family laws” were put into place restricting the rights of wives, daughters, and women in general (Ibrahim, 2000). The government’s rule has also resulted in oppressive conditions for the southern region of Sudan. The current conflict was spurred by the discovery of large reserves of oil near the southern territory’s border. Government sponsored efforts to pump southern oil into northern Sudan have involved extreme brutality as efforts to rid the southern territory of its inhabitants have manifested in genocidal violence (Beswick, 2001). A turning point in the conflict came when members of the Sudan
Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement attacked the Sudanese government air base in April of 2003. More than seventy-five government troops were killed, while the rebels lost only nine men and escaped with vehicles, weapons, and ammunition (Kothari, 2008). The Sudanese government responded by recruiting soldiers from ethnic Arabic-speaking tribes, forming a militant group called the Janjaweed, to fight against the rebels in the Darfur region (Kothari, 2008). Brutal tactics used by the Janjaweed, such as rape, burning villages, and other violent attacks, have largely been tolerated by the Sudanese government in its pursuit of political goals concerning land and resource allocation. The violent counter-insurgency campaign and its reverberations have destroyed hundreds of villages, displaced more than 2.4 million people, and caused the deaths of somewhere between 200,000 to 400,000 people (Martin, 2007).

One of the most disturbing characteristics of this conflict is the widespread and systematic use of rape to terrorize and demoralize Darfuri communities and their overall culture. Although sexual violence is often present in violent conflicts, much literature and international reporting has concluded that the systematic rape of Darfuri women and girls is being used as an instrument of genocide, intended to break down the Darfuri culture and “pollute” the population (see Martin, 2007). The stigma of rape, strong in any context, is especially strong in the Muslim culture that is characteristic of most of the Darfuri region. Many victims of sexual assault face suspicion and ostracization by their families, communities, and law enforcement and healthcare officials. Even when assistance or treatment is available, many women are reluctant to seek care (Martin, 2007). The silence and denial that
surrounds rape makes it almost impossible to estimate the number of women victimized by sexual violence, although the number is thought to be in the tens of thousands (Martin, 2007).

Sexual violence, however, is just one facet of this conflict. Destruction of villages, schools, medical facilities, families, and communities results in material, social, and psychological tragedies. As more and more Darfuris flee to refugee camps for internally displaced people, they face continued hardships. The lack of food, wood, medicine, schools, and other resources characterize life in refugee camps. Despite the promise of safety, attacks and rapes continue, especially if inhabitants venture outside the camp. When Darfuri people leave the camps to collect firewood, work on their farms, or attend local markets, they are under a constant threat of attack by the Janjaweed militia, governmental Sudan police officers and soldiers, and even those employed to guard the borders of the camps. Furthermore, the political situations in neighboring countries are becoming unstable as the refugees and the conflict spreads across borders (Martin, 2007).

The conflict began to draw international attention in 2004. In the spring of 2004, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution labeling the situation in Darfur a genocide, and the African Union deployed peace-keeping troops to the region. The African Union’s peacekeeping mission, however, had neither the funds, power, or materials needed to deploy an effective force. Various humanitarian aid organizations faced similar problems and ineffectiveness due to lack of resources and government opposition. In 2006, the United Nations Security Council referred the case of Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and approved Resolution
1706, which called for UN peacekeeping force, UNAMID to assist the African Union peacekeeping mission. In 2008, the prosecutor at the ICC filed 10 charges of war crimes, including genocide, against Sudan’s President, Omar al-Bashir, and issued an arrest warrant in 2009 (Martin, 2007). Al-Bashir has continued to deny and avoid the charges, and is currently running for re-election in Sudan (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). Recently, the Sudanese government signed a framework cease-fire agreement with rebel groups the Movement for Liberation and Justice and the Justice and Equality Movement, which is considered a preliminary step towards peace in Sudan (CNN Wire Staff, 2010). Overall, the national and international efforts concerning the conflict and the resulting violence and sexual assault have largely been insufficient.

In the year 2004, the conflict not only commanded international attention, but the attention of the mainstream media as well. Although inaccurate, the entire country of Sudan, as well as the racial lines of the conflict, was often defined by an African/Arab dualism. Various media outlets, humanitarian organizations, and the Sudanese government have perpetuated this simplistic dualism (Shapiro, 2006). Past studies of the media’s reporting on Darfur have concluded that when the U.S. media outlets began reporting on Darfur in March 2004, most reports were almost unanimous in their descriptions of the conflict (Bain, 2006; Kothari, 2008; Murphy, 2007). According to Murphy’s (2007) analysis of the media’s narration of Darfur, many reports were similar in their description of a vicious genocidal campaign of ethnic cleansing and rape carried out against the Blacks by the Arabs, allusions to the previous genocide in Rwanda, and recommendations for outside intervention.
The media’s meta-narrative of Arabs killing and raping Blacks has been criticized as a simplistic and de-politicized narrative. While this narrative makes for a good news story and gains the sympathy of readers, Haeri (2008) argued that it expenses the political, historical, and regional complexities of the situation, making it difficult to discuss realistic political choices and solutions. Additionally, demands for military intervention may worsen the crisis, especially if instigated or led by the U.S. An armed intervention without the consent of the government would likely be viewed as another expansion of American power into Muslim and Arab country. Overall, a military intervention could result in further entrenchment of the conflict, with multiple parties refusing to negotiate, compromise, comply with peace agreements, or allow humanitarian assistance (Haeri, 2008).

Additionally, the media’s portrayal of rape has specific gendered implications. Kothari’s (2008) media analysis claimed that many news stories depict the rape of Darfuri women using a “weapon of war” metaphor to symbolize the genocidal conflict between Black and Arab men, and as sympathy devices to attract the attention of readers. Reports often include intimate and violent details about the violation of raped women’s bodies, resulting largely in sensationalism, victimization, and voyeurism. Consequently, women’s voices are largely silenced, and their positionalities are limited to victims of violence or symbolic representations of genocide. On a larger scale, the media’s depiction of rape presents it as an isolated, horrific act of genocide without relating it to larger societal norms and responsibilities. Overall, depictions of Darfuri women’s bodies and stories have
often been co-opted for political and mediated agendas, and simplistic, sensationalized news stories (Kothari, 2008).

This brief background illustrates not only the ways in which the material situation and violence in Darfur shapes meanings and understandings concerning the conflict and Darfuri women, but also the ways that media narratives can further influence meaning, especially for removed, Western audiences. The following chapter outlines relevant literature in order to situate this historical background within my analysis and theoretical perspectives.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

A Feminist Exploration of Nationalism

The conflict in Darfur has been labeled a genocidal campaign of ethnic cleansing, characterized by the use of rape as a weapon of war. Consequently, issues of gender and identity are extremely salient and constitutive of serious physical consequences. Thus, in order to situate the material and discursive contexts that are at work within the Darfuri women’s narratives, a consideration of nationalism and its ideological and material implications on nations, social structures, men, women, and individuals is warranted. McClintock’s (1995) succinct characterization of nationalism: “all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous” (p. 61), points to both the ideological and material dangers of nationalism, and thus of the Darfuri conflict. Importantly, her quotation also frames nationalism, and the construction of nations and national roles, as inherently gendered, challenging the incomplete consideration of nations, which Enloe (1989) argued, “typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (p. 44). Thus, nationalism provides an important basis for my exploration of the workings of gender and its consequences, which are narrated within the national struggle in Darfur.

The socially constructed nature of nationalism is a well-known and basic tenet; Anderson’s (1991) description of nations as “imagined communities” has enjoyed widespread popularity in much nationalist literature. Although oftentimes defined by physical borders, a nation’s essential boundaries exist within Anderson’s “imagined community,” in the sense that a nation is a system of cultural
representation where an extended community of people are bound by an imagined set of shared identities, histories, and experiences. Nationalism is sustained by belief in a common history and a common future, and further nurtured by a sense of uniqueness or otherness from surrounding groups. This sense of commonality and uniqueness therefore, is dependent on an “other” to define the nation to in opposition. Nationalism then becomes an effective tool to distinguish between “us” and them,” and to explain and legitimize the inequalities between “us” and “them” (Anderson, 1991).

Such ideological frameworks, shared histories, and identity-based collectivities are often legitimized rhetorically through narratives, where the process of identification with a textual subject places individuals within a historical timeline and sets them on a path towards future action (Morus, 2007). In this way, narratives and other rhetoric can be understood as constitutive. Charland (1987) proposed that a collective people are hailed through their identification with a rhetorical subject position, thus acquiring certain characteristics of the subject, along with their place in a transhistorical story line. Consequently, collectivities heed rhetorical calls to action voiced in such narratives, placing them on a trajectory of social action. Charland (1987) describes constitutive narratives as “ideological not merely because they provide individuals with narratives to inhabit as subjects, and motives to experience, but because they insert ‘narratized’ subjects-as-agents into the world” (p. 143). Thus, the imagined community, or nation, as well as collective roles within them, become reified and performed in the material world through historical and rhetorical practices where social identities are invented,
performed and reproduced. Subsequently, nationalist discourses positioned within historical narratives often are constitutive of individuals’ identities and the roles that they acquire in and out of the nation, including ethnic and gendered distinctions (McClintock, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1998).

Despite wide academic recognition that nationalism is socially constructed, the gendered nature of nationalism has been explored less. Enloe (1989) argues that viewing phenomena such as nationalism through a feminist lens goes beyond simply recognizing that it has been ‘made’ through social construction, and focuses on who made it, how they made it, and for what purpose they made it. Additionally, Enloe (1989) poses an even more radical question - how can it be remade? Such inquiries lead to a more complete examination of nationalism and the ways in which gender and power differentials sustain it.

Critical questions concerning the power dynamics of identities, roles, meanings, and systems within nations often lead to the workings of patriarchy and gender for many feminist scholars (see Enloe, 1989; Mayer, 2000; McClintock, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1998). According to Mayer (2000), these nationalist power dynamics are directly linked to, if not inseparable from, constructs of gender and sexuality. Therefore, concepts of gender, sexuality, and nation are dynamically and continuously constructed and informed by each other. The gendered rhetoric of nationalist narratives is thus constitutive of collective “natural” gender roles within a nation and vice versa, as evidenced in the previous discussion of constitutive rhetoric. Consequently, nationalist systems both reflect and rely on gendered relationships that exist throughout societies, which includes other patriarchal
constructions of racial, ethnic, and class power that inform its constructions (Yuval-Davis, 1998).

As patriarchal systems, nations and nation making has historically been the domain of men, traditionally constructed from “masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 1989, p. 44). As such, the nation is constructed to serve elite males’ needs, and is therefore in need of constant protection. Consequently, the nation is often symbolically feminized through the masculine desire to protect and guard this representation (Banerjee, 2003; Mayer, 2000). As nations are largely conceived as heterosexual male projects, their patriarchal hierarchies and norms are intimately tied to the identities of the males that they privilege. Therefore, the identity of the nation and the identity of men are often intertwined, so that men feel a personal stake in the building, maintenance, and protection of the nation (Mayer, 2000). In this way, men are usually positioned as active agents of national change, revolution, and modernity. Women on the other hand are positioned as the keepers of nationalist tradition, embodying conservative, natural, and static characteristics of the nation (Banerjee, 2003; McClintock, 1995; Wilford, 1998).

As emblems of national tradition and culture, Enloe (1989) posits five ways in which this traditional nationalist discourses tend to define women: as vehicles for transmitting the nation’s values and culture from one generation to the next, as physical bearers of the nation’s future generations, as the members most vulnerable to defilement and exploitation by alien enemies, as the members most susceptible to assimilation by outsiders and enemies, and as the community or nation’s most
valuable possessions. As vehicles for transmitting the nation’s values and culture from one generation to the next, and as physical bearers of the nation’s future generations, women become nationally valued only for their passive ideological and biological reproductive capacities. Biologically they ensure the continuance of the nation through the physical reproduction of certain pure ethnicities or nations, and subsequently they relay discourses of national culture, conflict, and history to the next generation. These dual reproductive roles sustain the nation both physically and culturally, equally important functions for nationalism’s survival (Enloe, 1989; Wilford, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1998). In the sense that women are the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, they become intertwined with the national image and territory, requiring careful protection and guarding. It follows then, that women’s reproductive roles, and thus sexuality, become symbolic of the nation’s purity, fertility, and morality, for a pure nation can only be reproduced by modest, moral, and pure women. Thus, protecting and sustaining the nation is ultimately translated in part by controlling specific gender relationships and disciplining women’s bodies and sexuality (Wilford, 1998).

The consequences of such nationalist discourses go far beyond reproducing and naturalizing socially constructed gendered relationships and structures. As legitimizing foundations for unequal relationships and structures, nationalist discourses become legitimizing foundations for unequal treatment, thus resulting in unequal consequences for the men and women within them. Enloe’s (1989) final three ways in which nationalist discourses define women: as the members most vulnerable to defilement and exploitation by alien enemies, as the members most
susceptible to assimilation by outsiders and enemies, and as the community or nation’s most valuable possessions, can illuminate nationalism’s negative physical, political, and social consequences for women.

The various consequences stemming from these final gendered components of nationalism are especially salient for their oftentimes violent and oppressive manifestations. Positioned as the physical and ideological markers of nationalist boundaries, many women are subjected to vigilant, and oftentimes violent, discipline (McClintock, 1995; Wilford, 1998). The systematic rape in Darfuri is not a unique display of such discipline. From enforcing the use of Burkas, to carrying on the tradition of female genital mutilation, to restricting reproductive rights, the world is fraught with examples of this discipline. Such tangible consequences that result in part from gendered nationalisms warrant a distinctive consideration of nationalism's effects.

The dangers of such gendered nationalist discourses are powerful, varied, and subtle, often disguised by masks of normalization and legitimization. Acknowledging that these consequences are widespread and intersect with countless institutions, identities, and contexts, I nonetheless would like to highlight two general ways in which nationalist discourse may be considered dangerous: ideologically (or more specifically politically), and physically. Although the physical consequences of nationalism may seem more immediate, they are intimately intertwined with ideological conceptualizations. Ideological discourses form the organizing principles from which we act at the same time our actions shape our ideological discourses (Mumby, 2004).
As discussed in the previous section, nationalist discourses often position women as national symbols or possessions, valued for their cultural and biological reproductive capacities. As the national reproductive system, most women are necessarily positioned in passive, traditional, and conservative roles, while most men take more active, progressive, and defensive roles. These gendered constructions become normalized and enacted, thus significantly constraining available or acceptable choices for men and women in the nation. The enactment of these roles then further normalizes and legitimizes the gendered constructions, and so on (Wilford, 1998).

The normalization of these gendered constructions has largely led to a lack of feminine leadership or representation in public arenas, whether on the community, state, national, or international levels (Pettman, 1996). While nationalist movements may give women an important, seemingly empowering place within the nation (ensuring the survival of the nation), this place is nonetheless informed by patriarchy. By defining women’s national roles largely as loyal wife, diligent daughter, and nurturing mother, and masculine roles as active revolutionary, soldier, and politician, men are positioned to make decisions, form policies, and develop public skills that lead to positions of political authority, while women oftentimes fail to develop these skills and public reputations, shutting them out of leadership positions (Duncan, 1996; Enloe, 1989; Pettman, 1996). Although women have resided in formal leadership and political roles and taken part in militarized and revolutionary action, these roles largely tend to be the exception rather than the norm (Enloe, 1989; Fung, 2005; McClintock, 1995). This cycle continues to
construct nationalist discourses, nations, and international politics, which are maintained, understood, and performed largely as a masculine domain – an incomplete and incorrect picture that often goes unexamined. The gendered dynamics of international politics are discussed further in subsequent sections.

The material consequences of nationalism often extend beyond unequal political representation and gendered norms. As national leadership and authority is negotiated within political relationships, restricted gendered constructions oftentimes contribute to oppressive and even violent consequences – especially in the face of state building and national conflict. As the physical “realities” of nations, such as territories, borders, land, and resources are contested, so too are the symbolic identities attached to them. Tonn, Endress, and Diamond (1993) discuss how ‘territory’ is rhetorically constructed in physical ways as well as metaphysical ways. In this sense, communal or societal identities are connected to both personal qualities (i.e. the ‘rightful’ owner or the most dominant group), and a literal place. It is through this process that societal survival and maintenance becomes connected to the survival and maintenance of external and material worlds.

Consequently, the concept of a physical “state” becomes integral to nationalism. In addition to the intangible moral and historical consciousness that defines a collective community, the conceptualization of a nation is often attached to a tangible territory delineated by a set of recognized boundaries, otherwise known as a state (Mayer, 2000). The physicality of a nation state, however, can be experienced in multifaceted ways. For instance, nationalism can be a force seeking to create a state for a nation that does not have one, such as the Palestinians’
struggle for Israel, or can attempt to create a nation for a state that includes many diverse histories, cultures, languages, and ethnicities within its borders, such as sub-Saharan Africa (Kacowicz, 1998). Additionally, the physical representations of nationalism and nation states cannot be understood in isolation from the modern forces of globalization. For instance, in an increasingly globalized world characterized by the diminishment of technical, geographic, and cultural borders, intensifying nationalist efforts such as collective organizing for statehood, revitalizing local traditions, or fostering divergent national identities, may be a response to the homogenizing forces of globalization (Kacowicz, 1998). The powerful economic consequences of globalization have also been identified as inhibiting human rights and social justice. Kacowicz (1998) claimed globalization has led to a cruel and indifferent state, captive within the global market rather than by concern for its citizens.

Despite the multifaceted ways nationalism may converge and diverge with statehood, physical representation is usually a goal for most nations. In the face of finite resources and contested power relations, building and maintaining a sovereign state often requires armed conflict. Consequently, militarism and nationalism oftentimes go hand in hand (Nagel, 1998). Nationalist borders - physical, ideological, and cultural - delineate a collective identity, as well as an excluded “other,” to define themselves in opposition. Nagel (1998) claims that reifying such ideological and collective boundaries tends to foster ethnocentrism, which becomes particularly exaggerated and violent in times of national conflict or state building. Furthermore, when a nationalist movement becomes militarized,
male privilege and strict gender roles usually become more entrenched and strongly enforced (Pettman, 1996).

As discussed previously, within nationalist discourses, women’s bodies become an important boundary for the nation. In light of a conflict, however, their biological and cultural reproductive roles become even more entrenched. Enloe’s (1989) third function of nationalism, positioning women as members most vulnerable to defilement and exploitation by alien enemies, stems from their symbolic role as the nation’s boundaries. Women’s bodies symbolize and mark the ideological and physical space of the nation, and thus become the property of the nation, representing vulnerable feminized space that is open to invasion (Mostov, 2000). In times of conflict, especially ethnic conflict, borders symbolized by the nation’s women must be as carefully protected as the nation’s physical borders, for national enemies may dilute and contaminate the identity and culture of the nation through the vessel of a woman’s body (Mostov, 2000).

As a point of ‘entry’ for invasion, women’s bodies are not only seen as in need of protection, but as a potential threat to the nation as well. In this sense, they are positioned as national members who are the most susceptible to assimilation by outsiders and enemies (Enloe, 1989). Women thus become suspect in “border transgressions;” viewed as possible symbols of national vulnerability, shame, and defilement, or even as active traitors to the nation (Mostov, 2000). As symbolic of national space, any perceived transgression or contamination of its women is projected onto the nation’s men, the community, and the nation itself. It is here in the nationalist culmination of women as vehicles for transmitting the nation’s values
and culture from one generation to the next, as physical bearers of the nation’s
future generations, as the members most vulnerable to defilement and exploitation
by alien enemies, and as the members most susceptible to assimilation by outsiders
and enemies, that women are considered the community or nation’s most valuable
possessions (Enloe, 1989; Wilford, 1998). Positioned as national possessions, women
become construed by all that the word implies: passivity, subjection, vulnerability,
and, ultimately, if damaged - disposability.

Consequently, as national possessions, in times of nationalist conflict or crisis,
women’s bodies oftentimes become weapons of war used by male collectives. Enloe
(1989) posits that the control of a nation’s women is directly linked to the need to
increase control over a nation’s men, because a sense of collective manhood is
derived from comparative perceptions of other men’s masculinity, and therefore
related to the femininity of women of different races and social classes. Therefore,
control or colonization of a nation is largely dependent on the disruption of the
patriarchal power of the colonized men (McClintock, 1995). During nationalist
conflict then, these conceptions of masculinity and femininity play out on a grand
scale in appropriation to the nationalist discourse. For instance, George W. Bush’s
invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been characterized by an alarming disintegration of
Iraqi women’s rights and an increase of violence despite his declaration that "the
advance of freedom in the Middle East has given new rights and new hopes to
women..." (Lattimer, 2007).

As discussed previously, masculine ego is directly connected to the construct of
the nation, rendering any type (physical or ideological) of invasion of that nation as
a devastating blow to masculine collective ego and identity. As markers of national
territory and symbols of national health, culture, morality, and purity, the nation’s
women also become representative of masculine ego. Therefore, any physical
invasion of, or ideological assimilation of women demoralizes and humiliates the
collective ego and identity of the nation (Mostov, 2000).

When constrained in this way, women may become something akin to
nationalist pawns or collateral, manipulated simply as a mode of communication
between certain male collectives (Mostov, 2000). It is here that the symbolism of a
woman’s body requires physical discipline in varied ways; some more subtle, such
as restricted reproductive rights or a certain acceptable manner in which to dress,
or some more glaring, such as sexual violence or trauma in times of war. These, and
countless other forms of gendered discipline, are both interconnected and
differentiated by contextual and identity intersections (Yuval-Davis, 1998).

Although each are important and meaningful, my review will be limited to general
consequences of armed conflict on women, specifically ethnic-based conflict, in
order to better ground my analysis of the Darfuri context.

The consequences of nationalist discourses have been, and continue to be,
vividly and tragically illustrated in contemporary conflicts. As mentioned
previously, nationalist conflict tends to exacerbate existing inequalities (many
existing along gendered lines), and therefore has a disproportionate negative impact
on the least powerful members of society (see Fung, 2005). Furthermore, armed
conflict in the latter half of the last century has been dominated by civil wars and
regional conflicts that pit communities along racial, religious, and/or ethnic lines,
resulting in civilian populations being victimized on massive scales (IRIN, 2005).

The conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, Algeria, Myanmar, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, East Timor, and Kosovo have been defined by such characteristics (IRIN, 2005). An estimated 95 percent of causalities in modern wartime are civilians – the majority consisting of women and children - leading many analysts to conclude that they have become the preferred targets in these types of conflicts (Waller & Rycenga, 2000). The perception and the continued representation of men as the main actors in militarized situations, however, disguises the disturbing fact that militarization has become more dangerous to civilian women than to armed men because women, as symbolic and reproductive vessels of those national identities, become the main targets and means for their eradication (Waller & Rycenga, 2000).

Many national conflicts defined by ethnically motivated nation building and political projects have resulted in violence against women reaching epidemic proportions (Kesic, 2000). Many researchers have concluded that much of this violence is being used as a weapon of war, rather than resulting from opportunistic or chaotic impulses. In particular, a disturbing trend in many recent ethno-nationalist conflicts has been the use of systematic rape as a tactic of war (IRIN, 2004). Rape and other sexual violence, including forced impregnation, is commonly used to destabilize and contaminate populations, and to destroy family and community bonds. While the use of rape in war dates back to biblical times and has been documented in almost every major war including World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and so on, only recently has
the practice garnered legal and international attention (Brownmiller, 1975, 1994). Amnesty International, the International Criminal Court, and many other international organizations now consider rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing and a war crime (IRIN, 2004). As a tool for ethnic cleansing, sexual violence has been described as a form of fighting between men, using a woman’s body as a vessel. A recent report on gender-based violence summarized, “Women and girls are singled out because the harm and humiliation inflicted not only hurts them, but also deeply harms and affects the men in the targeted community...such sexual violation of women erodes the fabric of community in a way that few weapons can...this type of rape is about cleansing or changing the ethnic makeup of a group” (IRIN, 2004). Researchers have estimated that half of a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, 50 percent of all women in Sierra Leone were subjected to some type of sexual violence, 40 percent of girls and women in Liberia have been victims of sexual abuse, and between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped in the Bosnia-Herzegovina war in the 1990’s (IRIN, 2004). Current reports from the DRC and Sudan continue to describe ongoing sexual violence and other trauma.

Despite the positive development of recent statutes and resolutions that have increased international standards of accountability, systematic sexual violence and the consequences of its aftermath continue to persist. Impunity and silence tend to accompany most instances of sexual violence. International tribunals can only prosecute a fraction of the cases, and national governments often do not have the resources or the commitment to pursue crimes of sexual violence against women (IRIN, 2005). Additionally, crimes of sexual violence are hugely underreported. Rape
is stigmatized to varying degrees in all cultures, but within an ethno-nationalist conflict, rape victims are especially subject to shame, ostracization, and blame from their families and communities. Many times rape is viewed as not only degrading the victim, but more importantly, their family and community as well (Brownmiller, 1975, Seifert, 1998). Aligning with a nationalist discourse, a raped woman is seen not as a victim, but as a guilty party responsible for bringing shame and dishonor upon her family, community, and nation. Women who do report crimes of sexual violence often face overwhelmed humanitarian staff equipped with inadequate resources, or worse, government officials that are indifferent or even hostile. For example, in the past, Darfuri women pregnant as the result of rape could be charged with an ‘illegal pregnancy’ (IRIN, 2004). As a result, many times the focus shifts to concealing the assault rather than seeking justice, medical care, or emotional support. For these reasons, any estimate of sexual violence in times of conflict is just that, and most likely represents only a fraction of assaults. Furthermore, women’s own experiences of violence and conflict continue to be underrepresented in media accounts, research, political reports, and legal councils concerning national or international conflict.

While addressing systematic sexual violence in armed conflict is critical, some feminist authors have pointed to the danger of focusing on women solely as victims (Schneider, 1993). A totalizing focus on women as victims of sexual violence continues to perpetuate feminine nationalist roles as overly passive, vulnerable, and victimized, and also excludes the many other ways women are affected by armed conflict (Lindsey, 2005). First, some women do indeed take part in hostilities,
revolutions, or organized protests, and many also resist in smaller ways in their households or communities (Lindsey, 2005). As the majority of the civilian population in times of conflict when many men are fighting, detained, killed, or displaced, women oftentimes become heads of the household with little or no preparation or experience. Consequently they must bear greater responsibility for their children, elderly relatives, and the community as a whole. Furthermore, often they must do so in a hostile and difficult environment characterized by a lack of food and water, restricted movement, and the threat of violence (Lindsey, 2005).

Further heightening the stress and danger of armed conflict is the threat of displacement. Women and children make up the majority of the world’s millions of refugees and displaced people (Fung, 2005). As refugees or internally displaced people, women must cope with their new dependency on erratic humanitarian aid and on local populations with whom they are not familiar and who may be hostile. Many women have to travel long distances for food and water, exposing themselves to further attacks, injuries, or sexual abuse (Fung, 2005). Additionally, as the majority of the civilian population, women are often in place to begin sowing the seeds of peace and healing in their communities post-conflict (Fung, 2005). In sum, systematic rape and sexual assault within nationalist conflicts is obviously a critical and immediate issue that should rightfully garner international attention and support. This attention, however, should not eclipse women’s multifaceted experiences of war, or serve to present them solely as victims to the exclusion of their resilience, courage, and leadership in times of conflict, displacement, and peace building.
To summarize, nationalism provides a valuable set of theoretical connections between ideological and gendered imaginings of nations, communities, and collective identities, and material manifestations such as national conflicts and extreme violence. In particular, nationalism can be used as one lens to understand the subtle evolution of a gendered social construction into the use of systematic rape in national conflicts. Overall, constructions of femininity and masculinity affect the ways in which nations are constructed, enacted, defended, and invaded, thereby resulting in national and international structures, roles, and politics that continue to reproduce these gendered constructions. At the intersection of discourses of nation, gender, and sexuality, men have been positioned as active builders, advancers, and defenders of a nation, and women as static symbols and reproducers of national culture, heritage, image, and territory. Women therefore, are often burdened with the obligations and limitations that come with serving as the custodians and boundaries of national cultural heritage and identity. Moreover, in times of conflict, this burden is exponentially increased. Women are oftentimes disproportionately affected by conflict and militarism; their bodies becoming the symbolic and physical site of warfare between men and nations.

Viewing nationalist discourses, nations, and politics through a gender blind lens continues to construct a national landscape that is exclusively male, creating an incomplete and inaccurate view of how nations are created, sustained, and reproduced in gendered ways. Imaginings of international politics and nationalist movements informed by women’s experiences of oppression, nations developed and guided by feminist ideas and experiences, and a balanced international political
system do not occur in this landscape. A more gender-sensitive examination, however, constructs a more complete picture of how nations and international relationships and politics are formed, how they function, and how they can function differently. This picture is the topic of the following section. Nationalist discourses are negotiated and formalized through intertwined cultural and political processes. Therefore, as the formal structures that house nationalist discourses and relationships, political systems should also be examined and imagined with a feminist lens.

**Unequal Representation: The Gendered Nature of International Politics and Conflict**

As the previous review of nationalism demonstrated, nationalist discourses, roles, and conflicts are heavily imbued with gendered implications that resonate throughout all levels of personal, social, economic, and political life. In particular, as formalized articulations of nationalist discourses, political systems reflect and create gendered constructions on multiple levels. A discussion of the gendered nature of the political sphere therefore reveals its disciplinary power, which stems from its masculine, privileged position in much of society. The gendered dichotomy that exists between the public realm and the private realm functions to privilege the importance and influence of public life over private life, disguising their connections and reliance upon each other (Duncan, 1996). When women’s nationalist roles are regulated to the private sphere (biological and cultural reproduction), and men’s are regulated to the public sphere, the formal decisions that produce laws, policies, conflicts, peace negotiations, nationalist movements, and international relations,
which accordingly affect personal lives, are largely masculine (Pettman, 1996). Therefore, a brief discussion of the gendered nature of international politics, especially in regards to national conflicts, provides a general framework for the ways in which the lives of Darfuri women have been shaped and constrained by masculine political control. Additionally, a gendered look at politics and public decisions recognizes the interdependence of the public and the private, and thus the expansion of women's roles and new possibilities for Darfuri women.

An average of 15.6 percent of political representatives around the world are female, with the percentage dipping as low as 6.8 in Arab states (IRIN, 2005). On an international level, politics have been constructed, maintained, and perceived as the domain of men. In general, governments and international relationships are perceived to consist of male controlled resources such as economic capital, weapons, and political power. A feminist examination reveals, however, that in order to maintain their economic systems, conduct their affairs, and function according to the status quo, governments depend on certain types of gendered, private relationships and values (Enloe, 1989; Pettman, 1996). Internationally, politics and governments are dependent on the continued control and power over feminine roles, which provide governments with national symbols, reproductive capacities, consumers, cheap(er) labor, emotional work, etcetera (Enloe, 1989). A feminist examination of international politics exposes the political roles women play in sustaining the current system of international politics and governments (Enloe, 1989; McClintock, 1995; Pettman, 1996). Furthermore, a feminist examination of international politics reveals that the lack of women in governments, nationalist
movements, and wars is a result of social processes and structures that have been created and sustained to keep most women out of influential political positions (Enloe, 1989; Fung, 2005).

In times of national or international conflict, the political actions and decisions of governments become especially critical. As systems primarily controlled and structured by elite men, these decisions usually have disproportionate effects on those with less power, oftentimes women (Pettman, 1996). Furthermore, when regulated to the private sphere, vocalizations of women’s experiences, concerns, and solutions are often underrepresented or marginalized (Campbell, 1989; Duncan, 1996). This political marginalization can therefore affect understandings of the conflict, of women’s roles in the conflict, and also possible solutions or peace negotiations. As with armed conflict, peace and security are also asserted and perceived as military (masculine) matters, usually defined as the end of hostilities, rather than sustainable security, the enjoyment of human rights for all, and individual empowerment (Pettman, 1996). Therefore, the marginalization of women’s voices in political systems limits more diverse possibilities for peace and social change.

In terms of possible solutions, peace negotiations, and the long process of re-building after a conflict, women’s voices may provide more sustainable and empowering options than conceived from a traditional masculine perspective (Mendez, 2005). In formal peace processes, women have the potential to transform and refocus negotiations and policies by bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to the negotiations. In addition to offering a more gender-balanced
perspective, their knowledge is often grounded in the understanding of the day-to-day realities of civilian populations (Lindsey, 2005). Peace policies based on this diversified knowledge might contribute to a more sustainable peace, as it would better respond to the direct needs and priorities of a society as a whole rather than an elite minority of politicians (Fung, 2005). Therefore, significant possibilities for change may be imagined when a gendered perspective is utilized in forming peace negotiations, and most importantly, when women have a role in post-conflict leadership, decision-making, and political representation (Mendez, 2005). Overall, the gendered and dualistic nature of many political systems limits women’s capacities to represent themselves and have a voice in formal decision making processes that can have significant impacts on their lives and material situations.

Challenging this dualistic conceptualization of public and private and achieving more equal political representation, however, may lead to a more complete understanding of social life and relationships, as well as more possibilities for social change.

To summarize, gendered nationalist discourses are displayed and institutionalized within political systems and international relationships. These processes thus inform political leadership and representation, nationalist movements, armed conflicts, and peace processes among others. Rather than treating these structures as inherent and the public/private dichotomy as legitimate, a gendered analysis examines the ways in which they are dependent on artificial constructions of masculinity and femininity. Additionally, a gender-sensitive view of international politics reveals ways in which the world may be
remade by challenging and reconsidering gendered constructions that function on personal, social, cultural, national, and international levels (Pettman, 1996).

Addressing gender-blind political decision-making and making room for both women and men in all areas of political, cultural, economic, and social life may transition the world into a more sustainable concept of peace and security, and a more equal international political system (Enloe, 1989; Fung, 2005; Pettman, 1996). According to many feminist theorists, the first step in this monumental process is to give women’s experiences and subjectivities a voice (Enloe, 1989). Feminine voices create a space that engenders and challenges policies, processes, experiences, and structures that are often left unexamined by the masculine conceived nation. Enloe (1989) articulates this connection: “Making visible women’s experiences with conflict and their contributions to peace and security, is the first step towards engendering the peace process and creating a space for women’s participation” (p. 226). This connection inspires the final section of the literature review, which focuses on women’s voices as powerful sources of agency, empowerment, and change.

**Selective Hearing: A Gendered Consideration of Voice and Narrative**

According to Brown and Gilligan (1992), at its most basic, voice is a channel of connection. As a channel of connection, voice brings thoughts and feelings into a public relationship with others, to be heard, interpreted, and addressed. Conversely, voice and the expression of one’s self are also shaped and negotiated within relationships to culture, discourse, society, community, and other individuals. In this way voice is inherently relational, relying on the connection between the speaker
and the listener for its meaning. Additionally, as a relational public expression, voice connects and reveals the cyclical relationship that psyche, language, context, and culture have in informing and shaping each other (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). As inherently relational, the manner in which voices are unheard, as well as how they are heard, is equally important. While voice is manifested as an individual expression, it is nonetheless imbued with relations of power, politics, and gender. Therefore, how one’s voice is heard, ignored, perceived, interpreted, or responded to oftentimes reflects these relational structures. Alcoff (1991) posits that power relations of domination, exploitation, and subordination constitute voice and speaking. Therefore, who is speaking, who is spoken of, who listens, and how they interpret and respond is not only relational, but a political struggle as well. Indeed, many feminist researchers have demonstrated the ways in which certain people have traditionally been ignored, their words silenced, and their place in history overlooked (Reinharz, 1992). Generally, claims that women and other marginalized members of society are systematically silenced and devalued is well documented and accepted within feminist thought (see Harding, 1997).

The political struggles inherent in voice can also be related to the struggle for rhetorical space. Code (1995) explained rhetorical space as a discursive location surrounded by boundaries, which structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them with the expectation of being heard and understood. The continuance and growth of voice is thus contingent on the appropriation of this rhetorical space. Johnson (2002) also offers insights regarding the power of rhetorical voice within her analysis of nineteenth century female rhetoricians. She
points out the powerful ability that rhetorical voice has to maintain institutionalized discourses of power, which has resulted in a historical patrolling of rhetorical space, and gendered struggles for the benefits that this space offers. Overall, she claims that rhetorical voice and space is powerful because of its ability to discipline, but it also offers a space of possibility as well. Thus, many feminist scholars have studied the political, social, and material benefits that come with accessing rhetorical space and the inclusion of more voices, which reveal multiple discourses, experiences, and interpretations of reality (Clair, Chapman & Kunkel, 1996; Collins, 1986).

A dialogic perspective of voice and narrative, however, posits that despite the political and constraining nature of discourse, there still exists competing discourses, alternate avenues of meaning, and subversive voices that can challenge dominant narratives and meanings. Ewick and Silbey (1995) argue that hearing the multiplicity of voices and stories that have been silenced or obscured challenges the illusion of an objective and naturalized world, which oftentimes sustains inequality and powerlessness. By allowing the traditionally silenced to speak, social life may be rewritten in ways that are more liberatory. In order to move in this direction, Reinharz (1992) claims that the invisible must be made visible, the marginalized must be moved to the center, the trivial must be deemed important, and women must be positioned as competent actors and active subjects instead of objects for men. Furthermore, to achieve this, spaces for diverse dialogue must be created, where voices can speak with and to each other, rather than for each other. Alcoff (1991) asserted that ignoring oppressed people’s voices maintains unequal power relations, but also that objectifying oppressed groups as victims that must be spoken
for disempowers them, and may further obscure their own ability to speak and be heard in multifaceted ways. Through the act of speaking, voice constitutes a subject and therefore challenges the simplistic relationship between knower and object of knowledge. Multiple voices, experiences, and worldviews, experienced and heard in dialogue are thus critical to reducing the reproduction of oppressive and silencing discourses (Alcoff, 1991).

The systematic exclusion of feminine voices is clearly illustrated in national and international politics and in armed conflict. As discussed previously, women's access to national and international politics is restricted, and/or their contributions trivialized, due to patriarchal structural inequalities and a gendered dichotomy opposing public and private life. These unequal expressions of masculine and feminine voice in international politics have cyclical consequences that sustain inequality (Pettman, 1996). This cyclical process, however, may be challenged and disrupted with feminine voices. Alternatively, as more feminine voices are heard, women's confidence in using their own experiences and knowledge as the basis for navigating and leading in nationalist politics will increase, challenging the traditional dichotomy (Enloe, 1989).

Additionally, armed conflicts have unique consequences for feminine voices. Nationalist conflicts oftentimes exacerbate existing inequalities, and therefore further marginalize subordinate voices and experiences (Fung, 2005). Furthermore, in times of nationalist conflict, women's concerns or criticisms regarding patriarchal systems or traditions are often silenced or put aside under the primary goal of national survival and the physical immediacy of the conflict (Enloe, 1989). The
sentiment ‘now is not the time’ can extend into peace-building and post-conflict decision-making, often reproducing and maintaining traditional patriarchal political systems. Silencing women’s voices in these instances obscures the ways in which national conflicts and politics can be explained by power relations between men and women, and ensures that women continue to sacrifice their needs and goals for the male-led collective (Enloe, 1989).

Due to modern technological advances, the issue of voice within nationalist conflicts now extends far beyond the affected nation’s borders. The media attention that armed conflict typically attracts has powerful implications for the ways in which feminine voices are perceived, interpreted, and presented. Thompson, Toro, and Gomez (2007) discuss ways in which mainstream media coverage of war often distorts or ignores women’s perspectives and experiences in armed conflicts and peace-building processes. As a widespread and powerful platform for voice and social interpretation, Thompson et al. (2007) explain that the media’s power in warfare is extensive for its ability to define, edit, and frame particular stories, people, and experiences. Referencing multiple media studies, including recent coverage of the Rwanda and Congo conflicts, the authors conclude that mainstream media coverage of war rarely includes varied perspectives and experiences of women, beyond stereotypical representations as victims and refugees. This absence of multi-faceted women’s voices in armed conflict is attributed to the gendered construction of conventional war and war reporting, including male corporate control of the media (Thompson et al., 2007).
Traditionally, news outlets covering war value “official” and “objective” sources, such as military personnel or political leaders. Largely restricted from these types of “official” roles, women’s voices and experiences of war are excluded, or minimized as soft news, fit only for human-interest columns. Additionally, short deadlines, commercial pressure, and budget constraints result in sensationalized, oversimplified stories, which typically fail to examine the complexities and various perspectives of war (Thompson et al., 2007). Enloe (1989) explains that news media outlets often fall back on the assumption that women are innocent and vulnerable in the arena of international affairs, and therefore describe conflicts using standardized depictions that group women with children as innocent dependents, or as mutilated victims of violence. Victimization of women is often sensationalized in order to attract sympathetic readers, but often has the effect of re-victimizing them and reducing their ability to speak for themselves (Thompson et al., 2007). In this way the voices and experiences of women are co-opted and edited for the commercial needs of the media, which both reflects and reproduces gendered constructions of nations, war, and international politics.

To mask or marginalize the voices of women in this manner continues to uphold the patriarchal systems that dominate the world, and suppresses powerful forces for inclusive security, peace, and human rights (Fung, 2005). Numerous feminist and women’s peace organizations have noted that women are often the most powerful voices for moderation in times of conflict (Pettman, 1996). While this gendered categorization contains many notable exceptions, and does not imply essentialism, the socially constructed positionalities of women’s voices and
experiences often provide an alternative perspective of conflict, grounded in a more ecological conception of social justice, human rights, and sustainability (Thompson et al., 2007). An engendered and more inclusive consideration of war, peace-processes, and post-conflict reconstruction is therefore crucial to correct the perception of women as victimized, passive, absent, and inept in political processes and armed conflict. Acknowledging this need, in 2000, the UN Security Council passed UN Resolution 1325, which calls for greater recognition of the impact of war on women and more equitable participation for women in peace negotiations and post-conflict peace-building efforts (Thompson et al., 2007). While this international resolution is a step in the right direction, actual instances of implementation continue to lag. Therefore, it is imperative that women’s own experiences and perspectives concerning active survival, community leadership, and peace-building efforts are made visible. As with the silencing of women’s voices, their visibility will also have cyclical effects, strengthening and encouraging other women’s voices, and legitimizing other social and political movements that are based on these values (Thompson et al., 2007).

To conclude the discussion of voice, the role of narratives within these contexts must also be addressed. Narratives serve as a powerful vehicle for voice, and an important sense-making tool for both individual and collective identities (Mumby, 2004). In addition to explaining social processes, narratives themselves are social processes, constituting what they seek to explain (Murray, 2003). Narratives therefore become essential to understanding the creation, reproduction, and challenge of gendered constructions of nationalism, politics, and voice.
On the most fundamental level, narratives serve an important sense-making role for individuals, collective identities, organizations, societies, and cultures (Mumby, 2004). According to Murray (2003), humans exist and interact within a storied world, where the actions of self and others are interpreted and organized through narratives. Therefore, narratives are not only imposed on social life, but constitute it as well. In the absence of a definitive agreement on what constitutes an “official” narrative, here I refer to narratives as texts that display three main features as purported by Ewick and Silbey (1995): narratives involve the selective appropriation of past events and characters, events in narratives are temporally ordered, and events and characters are related to each other and to some overarching structure, often in the context of a conflict or struggle. Narratives therefore are sense-making devices in that they constitute meaning and identities by configuring events in a particular way and positioning them within a larger process that is unfolding over time (Morus, 2007). In this sense narratives are vital to the construction and maintenance of individual and collective identities and fundamental in shaping how we think about ourselves and interact with others (Polletta, 1998).

Narrative accounts are formed and expressed through the social and relational mediums of language and interaction, and are thus socially constructed and co-constructed. Consequently, meaning is not merely constructed and interpreted by the narrator, but must be negotiated and accepted within the relationship with the listener, wider audiences, and larger social and cultural contexts (Murray, 2003). As socially constructed and negotiated texts, narratives are
tangible products of, and influencers of, discourse and power relations. According to many critical scholars, narratives are therefore inherently political and imbued with power relations, functioning to privilege and reproduce certain social realities and forms of sense making over others (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Furthermore, discourses of power relations influence what types of narratives are acceptable and intelligible, who can tell stories, or which subject positions and stories are more powerful in influencing social relationships (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). In a cyclical fashion, these dominant narratives then reproduce, legitimize, and institutionalize the power relations that constitute them.

Although not operating within neutral contexts, narratives can also function subversively to challenge, renegotiate, or transform dominant discourses. Langellier (1989) conceptualized narratives as political and material performances that reproduce and occur within certain relations of power, but also as a means for resisting certain relations of power. Ewick and Silbey (1995) posited that narratives have the potential to reveal diverse truths about the social world that traditionally have been marginalized and silenced. By giving voice to traditionally marginalized subjects and groups, narratives have the capacity to undermine dominant discourses that sustain the illusion of an objective, natural world, which oftentimes sustains inequality and powerlessness (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). Just as narratives can strategically shape and serve dominant political functions, they can also transform dominant discourses by expressing new collective identities, vocalizing invitations for political mobilization and social change, and encouraging collective action (Reissman, 2008). Overall, uncovering subversive narratives can contest dominant
meanings and power relations and rewrite social representations and relationships in a more liberating manner (Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

In summary, this literature review began with discussing the artificial constructions of femininity and masculinity that are woven throughout nationalist discourses, moved to how these discourses are performed within international politics, armed conflict, and within the “private” sphere, and arrived at an examination of how the expression of certain voices, perspectives, and experiences, particularly through narratives, can sustain but also challenge this system. In general, particular methods of communication, information, and performance of these gendered constructions play a major role in sustaining the patriarchal paradigm that dominates the world. As a system, this patriarchal paradigm has silenced, controlled, and devalued women’s voices and experiences in both dominant and dominated societies and nations. Challenging the paradigm requires listening to and re-valuing the voices, experiences, perspectives, and proposals of women. Addressing this invisibility also entails deconstructing dichotomous nationalist conceptions of masculine and feminine, private and public. Each can be said to inform the other: listening to women’s voices will disrupt dichotomous national roles, and challenging the merits of these roles will allow for the visibility of women’s voices, and so on. Within international politics and armed conflicts particularly, making women’s voices visible can strengthen solidarity and confidence among other feminine voices, and generate widespread support for other movements struggling for peace, human rights, and empowerment. Finally, despite the powerful, pervasive, and systematic hold that conceptions of masculinity
and femininity have within nations and conflicts, their socially constructed nature, which hinges on interaction, communication, and performance, means that it is possible for them to be challenged and transformed.

**Project Justification and Research Questions**

The literature that I reviewed pointed to a cultural absence of women - an absence that is at once physical as well as discursive and constructed, but also very real. From disproportionate representation in all levels of government, to media reports that are disguised victimologies, to the limitation to the realms of the private, passive, and symbolic within nationalisms, women and their experiences have generally been written out, co-opted, and marginalized throughout history by patriarchal systems and masculine discourses. Furthermore, many feminist researchers have identified this absence within academic research and analyses as well. Harding (1987) argued that traditional analyses within the social sciences have reproduced partial and distorted accounts of social life, and continue to operate in a culture that “systematically silences and devalues the voices of women” (p. 7). She explained the activities that men have considered important to study, and the certain ways in which they have chosen to perceive them, study them, communicate about them, and present them, have historically shaped social life. Additionally, many studies take the form of victimologies, creating a limited view of women as victims rather than active survivors or resistors, and thus contributing to the impression that women cannot be effective social or political agents (Harding, 1987).
As a result, feminist theory acknowledges that the questions asked (as well as the questions not asked) in the name of research determine the answers that can be discovered and the knowledge that can be known. Consequently, feminist research is grounded in women’s experiences. It begins by inquiring about what appears problematic for women, and concludes with answers or discussions for women (Harding, 1987). In adopting a feminist theoretical base for this project, I see my methodologies and analyses as a response to the documented absence of women in social practices and discourses, as well as in traditional social scientific research. My project therefore attempts to not only “add” women’s voices and experiences to research, social practices, and gendered discourses, but to critically examine the processes in which discourses constitute, reproduce, and limit certain voices and experiences, as well as how they can be transformed by those voices and experiences.

More specifically nationalist armed conflicts often serve to exacerbate the physical and ideological marginalization of women, pointing to an even greater need for the exposure and acknowledgment of their diverse experiences (Fung, 2005). Additionally, media coverage of armed conflicts traditionally co-opt women’s experiences for sensationalized headlines and stories of victimization, which reproduce skewed gendered discourses (Thompson et al., 2007). The ongoing conflict in Darfur not only offers a timely and critical exemplar for theoretical examination of how women’s voices and experiences have functioned within and beyond this context, but the crisis also calls for immediate practical attention as well. Furthermore, while previous research has focused on similar conflict
situations in nations such as Rwanda or Yugoslavia, the ongoing and chronic nature of the conflict in Sudan has received less theoretical attention. Therefore, rather than a retrospective analysis of past conflicts, engaging with an extant phenomena such as the conflict in Darfur presents more possibilities for meaningful transformation and dialogue. A commitment to the discursive and socially constructed nature of identities, social relationships, and power maintains that the possibility for transformation and resistance exists within each interaction, communicative action, and voice (Mumby, 2004). In this light, my project aims to challenge the traditional masculine discourse regarding armed conflict and politics, and join in a transformative and alternate discourse in order to move forward on the slow and twisted path for social and political change. Overall then, I believe that the conflict in Darfur presents an urgent opportunity to engage in what Reinharz (2007) articulates as feminism’s dual vision: theoretical advancement and commitment to social change.

In consideration of the previously reviewed literature, theoretical commitments, and current world events, I ask the following questions to guide my analysis: how do the Darfuri women’s narratives change or enhance our understandings of the conflict, of Darfuri women, and of women in general? In what ways do the Darfuri women’s narratives both subvert and reproduce gendered positions found in dominant discourses? And, in what ways do the women’s narratives point to possibilities for transforming social relationships?

I leave these questions intentionally broad in an attempt to allow a fuller scope of voices, experiences, discoveries, and interpretations. Overall, these
inquiries explore the women’s experiences, identities, and voices as they are both constrained and enabled by the gendered discourses discussed previously.

Flax’s (1987) discussion of the objectives of feminist research articulates the aims of my research questions and overall goals of my project well:

We need to recover and explore the aspects of social relations that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within dominant (male) viewpoints. We need to recover and write the histories of women and our activities into the accounts and stories that cultures tell about themselves. Yet we also need to think about how so-called women’s activities are partially constituted by and through their location within the web of social relations that make up society.

(p. 641)

My research questions, formed in light of Flax’s (1987) call to explore aspects of social relations that have been suppressed by dominant discourses, to recover the histories of women into the storied histories of cultures, and to examine how women’s activities and voices are constituted within the web of social relations, seem best addressed through a critical discursive analysis of narratives. This chapter describes the methodological framework used in this project
Chapter Three: Methodological Considerations

Theoretical Framework

A critical discourse perspective organizes the feminist goals and theoretical perspective of this study well, combining the communicative, feminist, and narrative underpinnings of this project. A critical approach to discourse examines instances of discourse not only for their communicative and sense-making functions, but also for their functions of legitimation and power (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). To unpack the term and thus the theoretical framework of critical discourse, the general concept of discourse itself must be addressed. Although the term discourse has been used and defined in a variety of ways, here I use it to refer to a certain set of interrelated texts that systematically form the objects that they reference, and therefore constitute the social world by articulating certain meanings and phenomena into being (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Put in another way, a discursive perspective situates collective identities and social relationships in language use and observable linguistic practices among its members, and focuses on its dynamic and recursive effects on social action and relations (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004).

Therefore, discourse produces social reality in that social representations are constituted, maintained, and reformed by social interactions through text and talk (Heracleous, 2004). In this way, a discursive perspective reflects the broader communicative notion of social constructionism, and reflects a general linguistic turn in the social sciences to view many social and psychological phenomena as
constituted by language, sustained by language, and challenged through language (Gabriel, 2004).

Largely influenced by the work of Foucault (1979), much attention has been paid to the disciplinary and legitimizing power of discourse. Discourse disciplines individuals in that they come to know themselves and others within the ideological and linguistic confines of dominant discourses, which affect their ability to think, speak, and act in certain ways (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Consequently, the disciplinary power of discourse results in material consequences, as it influences how ideas can be meaningfully thought and talked about, how ideas are translated into practice and interaction, and how behaviors are regulated. The manner in which discourse constrains and enables knowledge and communication thus legitimizes and normalizes social relationships and practices, resulting in discipline that is often subtle and unknown to the actors themselves (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Overall, discourses enable certain ways of perceiving, speaking, writing, and behaving while restricting others (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). A critical discourse perspective, then, focuses on the ways in which discourses privilege certain social meanings, identities, relationships, and structures in highly political manners. Mumby and Ashcraft (2004) argued, “meaning systems do not emerge simply through a process of dialogue and consensus but are viewed as the result of deep structure power relations that privilege particular political interests over others” (p. 48). Therefore, discourse becomes a site of struggle where various voices, interests, and identities compete to “fix” meaning in a way that serves their interests. A critical perspective of discourse consequently views discourses as vehicles that promote
social constructions that support and perpetuate the interests of dominant groups or classes (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Additionally, a critical discursive approach acknowledges that discourse operates and disciplines on multiple levels. Broad or “grand” discourses (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000) such as racism, patriarchy, or classism construct subjects, relations, and structures that enable and limit a range of more individual social practices. More micro-level discourses and texts, however, also may reproduce, reinterpret, or challenge broader level discourses (Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

Feminist thought in particular posits the pervasiveness and power of a “grand” discourse of patriarchy, which constitutes, structures, and legitimizes the social world through a totalizing male perspective, thus functioning to serve and maintain patriarchal interests (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Even when gender is not overtly apparent, feminist scholars maintain that meanings, identities, and positions are often differentiated and valued in terms of male, female, masculine, and feminine within the broader discourse of patriarchy (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). Therefore, feminist critical approaches to discourse often explore how discourses of gender, power, and patriarchy intersect to produce relations of dominance and oppression, but also acknowledge possibilities for resistance and change. Despite many critical scholars’ struggle with the possibility of agency within the disciplining confines of discourse, feminist scholars often emphasize the multiple interpretative possibilities that exist in every discursive arena, and focus on the tension between control and resistance in the ongoing communicative struggle to fix dominant meanings (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). In terms of discursive discipline and agency
then, Mumby and Ashcraft (2004) see “mundane communication as a pivotal site where the dialectic of control and resistance resides and gender identities are made. Moreover, it attempts to recognize the ways in which institutions shape and are shaped by interaction” (p. 55). Overall, although grand discourses are pervasive and powerful, the multitude of subject positions within them ensures that a dominant set of meanings is never completely fixed, creating space for resistance and counter-texts (Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

In sum, a critical discourse perspective focuses on the ability of language to construct and legitimize the social world in political ways, which privilege and maintain the interests of certain identities, groups, and structures over others. Furthermore, a critical perspective of discursive practices explores their disciplinary and oppressive functions, but also acknowledges agency and the possibility for resistance and transformation within multiple discursive levels. A critical discourse perspective therefore serves as an appropriate theoretical framework for this project in that its consideration of power and resistance aligns with feminist scholarship, it acknowledges that interaction and communication constitute social reality and thus affect material practices, relationships, and structures, and finally allows for resistance to and transformation of those same material practices through discursive means.

**Methods**

Consistent with the theoretical framework discussed above, I use a critical discursive analysis of personal narratives to explore multiple aspects concerning women’s voices and experiences within the context of the Darfuri conflict. Overall,
this methods section is divided into a primary discussion centering on the narrative texts used as data for analysis, and a secondary discussion of how a critical discourse analysis will be applied to narrative data.

As previous literature has demonstrated, narratives can be read as rich cultural sites, characterized by co-construction and interaction between multiple discourses, identities, voices, and interpretations. Narrative analysis has therefore been a popular way for critical scholars to explore the integration of multiple levels of discourse and power relations, as well as providing a fruitful site for the examination of both control and resistance (Grant, 2004). Overall, narratives may be critically analyzed as communicative performances within complex discursive systems that both enable and constrain possibilities for human communication praxis (Langellier, 1989). Consistent with the reasons articulated above, I believe personal narratives of Darfuri women can offer an important opportunity to critically examine discursive performances of power relations that are often disguised through normalization and legitimation - particularly those which revolve around gender and armed conflict. Furthermore, the potential for narratives to reveal diverse truths about the social world appropriates narratives for my use within a critical feminist theoretical scope. I believe that narratives can best display feminine voices that have traditionally been marginalized, especially in conflict situations such as Darfur where women's voices are further marginalized, victimized, or co-opted into dominant societal or media narratives. In this sense, narratives offer my project an opportunity to explore discursive control, resistance, and potential for social transformation.
For the purpose of this project, narrative textual data was defined as documented first-hand accounts of Sudanese women storying some aspect of the conflict in Sudan between the years of 2004 and 2009. As mentioned previously, many previous studies have addressed the popular news media's portrayal of Darfuri women and how they use the women’s narratives. Therefore, I chose to analyze women’s narratives found outside of the mainstream news media because they have been less studied, and have also been less edited by mainstream media outlets. Consequently, I searched for narrative data across online forums, humanitarian organizations, documentaries, and biographies. I selected narratives based on the cohesiveness and length of the account, direct references to the Darfuri conflict, and the presence of Ewick and Silbey’s (1995) three main narrative features: the selective appropriation of past events and characters, temporally ordered events, and relating events and characters to each other and to some overarching structure, often in the context of a conflict or struggle.

Overall, I selected a total of eighteen narrative accounts across various sources. A brief description of these sources is warranted for the multiple ways in which they possibly co-constructed or influenced the meanings and structures of the narratives and the women's voices. In general, the published narratives seemed to be directed at Western audiences, one reason being because they were printed in English. The narratives, however, were available to the general public, especially the narratives located online. In particular, I selected eleven narratives from an online forum sponsored by Physicians for Human Rights entitled Darfuriwomen.org, updated in 2009. This online forum posts multiple stories by anonymous Darfuri
women now living in the Farchana Refugee Camp in eastern Chad, that were collected by a team of Physicians for Human Rights researchers. Additionally, I selected five narratives from a textual documentary entitled *Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival*, published in 2006. The stories featured in this book were collected by three independent filmmakers who traveled to eastern Chad and Darfur in 2004 to speak with Darfuri people about their experiences. The written documentary presents multiple stories and quotations from Darfuri men and women that are interwoven with the filmmakers’ own experiences. I also chose a single narrative account composed by multiple Darfuri women that was featured on the Human Rights Watch organizational website in 2009. This narrative responds to the arrest warrant for Darfuri president, al-Bashir, that was announced in 2009. This document was hand written by the group of Darfuri women and translated and published online by the humanitarian organization. Finally, I chose a partial narrative from the larger autobiography of Halima Bashir entitled *Tears of the Desert*, published in English in 2008. The autobiography chronicles her experiences as a Darfuri woman in the midst of the conflict. I chose a portion of her overall story in which she directly recalled a personal experience regarding the conflict.

Using the eighteen narratives mentioned above, I performed a narrative analysis utilizing a critical discourse perspective. In general, narrative analyses interpret texts in a storied form and are grounded in the study of the particular and the specific. I consider Riessman’s (2008) explanation of a dialogic narrative analysis most appropriate for my project’s feminist and critical discourse perspectives. A dialogic narrative analysis is a broad and interpretative method of
narrative analysis that explores how narratives are interactively produced, performed, and interpreted. Considerations of content and structure are present within the analysis, however, attention is expanded from how and what the narrator says to include the complex dialogic environment that surrounds the narrative (Riessman, 2008). A dialogic analysis focuses on the interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive contexts that narratives are composed and received within, and investigates how these elements enter into storytelling in various ways. In this way, mundane communication or personal stories have the ability to reveal the workings of larger social discourses and power relations (Riessman, 2008).

A close reading and consideration of context is therefore a key component in dialogic analyses. Rather than taking the content of the narrative at face value, a dialogic analysis interrogates how contextual influences such as the investigator, various audiences, the setting, and social and cultural discourses shape the production, performance, interpretation, and dissemination of the narrative (Riessman, 2008). Consistent with this method, I address the larger discursive environment of the Darfuri women’s narratives including the physical contexts of the armed conflict, the influence of certain social and cultural beliefs, grand discourses of patriarchy and nationalism, and the functioning of international politics.

Additionally, the focus on the dialogic or discursive context of narratives involves specific attention to the influence of various audiences, voices, and discourses. Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor articulates the complex relationship between narrators and their audiences in terms of a performance.
Narratives are viewed as a particular “performance” of one’s self, for a particular audience, at a particular time and place. Concepts of self and individual identity are seen as social constructions dependent on linguistic interactions with others (Riessman, 2008). Put in another way, our self-identities are understood, constructed, and performed only in relation and through interaction with others. Thus, certain selves are performed in narratives with certain audiences in mind, and identity is negotiated through this performance (Riessman, 2008).

Furthermore, as larger social structures, power relations, and discourses become intertwined in individual consciousness and identity, they are performed through individual narratives for and with certain audiences. Therefore, the narrator’s identity as performed through the narrative cannot be separated from the role of the audience or larger social contexts and discourses (Riessman, 2008). Accordingly, my analysis draws heavily on the concept of dialogism to explore the complexities and tensions between the multiple voices, influences, and discourses found in the women’s narratives rather than forming simplistic, exclusive categories and conclusions. A more detailed conceptualization of dialogism, and how it functions within my analysis, is therefore discussed subsequently.

Baxter and Braithwaite’s (2009) discussion of dialogism, drawing from theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, generally posit that meaning making is an ongoing and dynamic discursive struggle between certainty and uncertainty, dialogue and monologue, and openness and closure. Language use is conceived as an interplay between dominant, certain, or centralized systems of meaning, and less dominant, marginalized, or open systems of meaning. While monologic discourses are
associated with stagnation, limitation, and indoctrination, the interplay of different, sometimes competing discourses in dialogism is considered the creative place where meaning is challenged, changed, and remade (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). Ideally, meaning emerges not from framing discourses as opposing either/or alternatives, but from the tension and contradiction between conflicting discourses that alters each system and creates new meanings. Consequently, the focus of dialogism centers on how communication can be used to create a space for individuals and relationships to change (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009).

Holmer-Nadesan (1996) draws from Daudi to explain this dialogic space as a space of action. Although dominant social discourses constitute certain meanings, identities, subject positions, and thus possibilities for action and material conditions, they are never completely self-contained or independent from other meanings and discourses. The multiple interpretations, meanings, and subject positions available in the forms of competing discourses inevitably manifest contradictions and tensions, thus threatening the integrity and self-containment of the dominant discourse. Space of action, an individual’s quest for agency, choice, freedom, and personal interest, arises from the surplus of meanings, interpretations, and competing discourses that come to light when there is a perceived lack of information or meaning in the dominant discourse (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). New or reframed meanings, identities, and experiences can thus be achieved in this dialogic space, subverting dominant discourses, although they are still constrained by dominant relations of power and knowledge.
These tensions, competing discourses, and multiple interpretations are evidenced in the complexity of women’s experiences and identities, and in the language used to make sense of those experiences and identities. According to Schneider (1993), contradictions such as victimization and agency should not be juxtaposed in opposition to each other, but understood as interrelated dimensions of women’s lives. Consequently, in my analysis, I reject simplistic and exclusive dichotomies of either victimization, or agency, and either control, or resistance, to explore the interdependent, contradicting, and ambiguous ways that these tensions dynamically interact in Darfuri women’s narratives and gendered subject positions.

The complexities revealed by a dialogic approach can also be useful for a critical perspective examining the dynamic roles of dominance and subordination in narratives. When examining narratives, a critical discourse analysis generally focuses on how narratives can function ideologically to privilege certain interests and social realities over others (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). As sense-making tools, narratives have a role in producing and institutionalizing performances of identity and social realities imbued with power relations under the cover of “everyday” discourse (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). A narrative analysis operating from a critical discourse perspective therefore assumes that surface level meanings and behaviors obscure deeper power relations, which constrain the possibilities for democratic societal relationships (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2004). A critical discourse perspective also examines narratives for silences. This entails not only a careful consideration of how power relations shape what is articulated in narratives, but also how power relations constrains what types of narratives are not articulated, or not heard. In this
sense, a critical discourse perspective explores what kinds of narratives can and cannot be heard and understood, what types of narratives can be produced, which are more socially influential, and what subject positions one must take to speak (Peterson & Langellier, 1997). Consistent with a critical discourse perspective, I focused on the discursive construction of gender and power within the everyday performance of particular narratives. Additionally, I also explore the ways in which the Darfuri women’s narratives may resist, challenge, or transform current power relations regarding gender. Finally, I address the concept of silence or absence in the Darfuri women’s narratives by exploring ways in which discursive environments may constrain possible experiences that are storied by the women, or the subject positions that they must take for their story to be heard.

In general, certain methodological considerations characterize the broad category of narrative analyses. In many narrative analyses, prior theory guides inquiry into narrative exemplars while researchers also seek novel theoretical insights from the data (Riessman, 2008). For this project, prior theoretical commitments to feminism and nationalism drove my narrative inquiry. In addition, narrative analyses oftentimes attempt to keep the sequence and content of the story intact, rather than fracturing it into coded categories. While narrative analyses can still generate categories and conclusions, an effort is made to keep the individual case intact, and to interpret the story as a whole (Riessman, 2008). Consequently, I tried to balance an interpretation of the women’s whole story with the generation of meaningful categories. In a broader sense, narrative analyses prompts readers to think beyond the content of the text, and attempts to move towards broader
commentary (Riessman, 2008). In this sense, narrative results can be generalized. Instead of statistical generalization, which is achieved through population-based samples, narrative approaches use specific cases to generalize to theoretical propositions and to generate conceptual inferences about social processes. Therefore, the results of narrative analyses are equally valid in their ability to generate knowledge and propositions that become the basis for other’s work (Riessman, 2008).

In sum, my methods are focused on how gender and power both constrains and enables meanings in narratives. I explored the various and dynamic ways in which gender and power shape the Darfuri women’s experiences, their identities, and their narratives. Additionally, I explored the ways in which resistance and subversive meaning might be located in the narratives. By examining how meaning is both constrained but also enabled by these contexts and discourses, my analysis therefore focuses on tensions and contradictions found within the women’s narratives.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

To conclude this section’s discussion of methods, my own subjectivities as a researcher must be acknowledged. According to Harding (1987), a feminist methodology demands that the researcher be placed in the same critical plane as the subject matter, for the rejection an objectivist stance in one’s research can only be achieved by acknowledging one’s own subjectivities and standpoints. Therefore, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions of the researcher must be placed within the frame of the analysis and explored for how it has shaped the research. As a
white, upper-middle class American attending graduate school, I understand that my standpoint and experiences are vastly different from many of the narratives’ authors in this project. In this sense my analysis and interpretations are partial. Despite my differences from the narrators, my focus on narratives that are largely consumed by Western audiences may be an area where my particular standpoint can yield insight. Overall, I do not claim to speak for these women, only outline my positioned interpretations.

Additionally, as a female, feminist thought and research has shaped much of my academic career and has largely informed this project conceptualization and critical analysis of gender. In general, I am committed to a feminist perspective of research as positioned and interpretive, rather than objective, authoritative, or universal. Therefore, I aim to privilege the voices and experiences of the Darfuri women rather than my own agenda in my analysis as much as possible. The project personally interests and concerns me as a woman, and as a global citizen. In sum, although I do not share the Darfuri women’s race, ethnicity, or geographic region, and while I acknowledge my removed and privileged standpoint, I do think that a critical analysis of gendered processes that contribute to oppression is necessitated both within and across all borders of time, race, ethnicity, class, and geography. The following chapter of my project presents my interpretative analysis.
Chapter Four: Analysis

Conflict, Contradiction, and Tensions: An Overview

The previously discussed historical background, academic literature, and theoretical framework have revealed that the material contexts, gendered identities, and narrative performances of Darfuri women are characterized by conflict, complexity, and contradiction. The complexities, contradictions, and tensions evidenced in the Darfuri women’s narratives, however, offer a rich site for exploring various meanings and understandings regarding the conflict and Darfuri women. Consequently, my analysis focuses on exploring such tensions and contradictions, and is divided into two main sections representing the two main sets of tensions that I found within the women’s narratives. The first section focuses on the presence of victimization and agency within the Darfuri women’s narratives, and the second focuses on the related presence of control and resistance. These tensions are situated within the material and ideological contexts of the conflict. Specifically, the tensions refer to how the women’s gendered identities are sources of control and victimization in nationalistic and patriarchal discourses, in addition to the emergent possibilities of agency and resistance. I explore these tensions not as opposing or exclusive narrative themes, but rather as interdependent, dynamic conceptualizations. Each section concludes with a discussion of the significance of these tensions and their relevance to my research questions. Before moving on to these sections, I briefly discuss the ways in which conflict, tension, and contradiction have shaped my analysis and overall project follows this preview and precedes my analysis of the first set of tensions.
Throughout the process of completing this project, the word “conflict” has appeared often – referencing the violent regional conflict in Darfur over resources, power, and identity, the conflict on an individual and community level concerning how to live with the uncertainties of war, the conflict over how to define the war and its aggressors, the international conflict about appropriate aid and solutions, the ideological conflict over gender roles and women’s marginalization, the conflict over whose voices are heard, and so on. The notion of “conflict,” therefore seems to be an appropriate place to begin my analysis. On a fundamental level, the various conflicts mentioned above seem to be conflicts over meaning - which meanings are correct, whose meanings are heard, and what meanings are enacted. As such, they form an overarching struggle for meaning that is central to the material situation and discursive contexts at work in Darfur, as well as in my analysis of Darfuri women’s narratives. This struggle, demonstrated through the conflicts, complexities, and tensions within the Darfuri women’s narratives, is significant for its meaning making potential.

As previously discussed, Baxter and Braithwaite’s (2009) discussion of dialogism posits that meaning making is an ongoing and dynamic discursive struggle between competing and contradictory discourses. It is within this struggle where meaning is challenged, changed, and remade, and a ‘space of action’ (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996) may be achieved. In this sense, new meaning emerges not from framing discourses as opposing either/or alternatives, but from the tension and contradiction between conflicting discourses. Consequently, I reject simplistic and exclusive dichotomies of either victimization or agency, and either control or
resistance, to explore the interdependent, contradicting, and ambiguous ways that these tensions dynamically interact in Darfuri women’s narratives and gendered subject positions.

The dialogic focus of my analysis therefore allows for the complication and expansion of traditional meanings and understandings. Scholars have previously chronicled the limited lens that the Darfuri conflict is viewed from, and the ways in which Darfuri women’s roles are limited to victim and/or symbolic representations of the violent genocide in the media. The narratives of Darfuri women, however, can offer different, and more complex perspectives. My analysis of their narratives revealed perspectives, experiences, and positionalities not limited to rape victim or passive symbol of genocide and ethnicity, but those that expand in interdependent and dialectic ways to encompass victimization and agency, as well as control and resistance. In this way, their narratives reveal a more complex understanding of conflict – both the Darfuri conflict in general, as well as the seemingly conflicting tensions and complexities of Darfuri women’s experiences and positionalities. The first section of my analysis explores the interdependent roles of agency and victimization within the women’s narratives, as well as the significant implications stemming from these tensions, and their relevance to my research questions.

**Agency and Victimization: Complicating Understandings of Darfuri Women’s Experiences and Identities**

Many scholars (see Schneider, 1993) agree that an exclusive focus on either victimization or on agency in women’s lives and experiences is incomplete and perhaps even detrimental. While an understanding of women’s experiences as
victims is necessary and important, an exclusive focus on victimization is limiting in that it obscures women’s active efforts to protect themselves, survive, and continue their lives. Alternatively, an exclusive focus on women’s agency, depending on notions of individual action, control, and mobility, ignores the very real social and structural constraints of oppression and victimization that are experienced by women (Schneider, 1993). The same can be said of the experiences and subject positions of Darfuri women. Both agency and victimization are complexly intertwined in their narratives and in the subject positions that they assume in their narratives. I first address the tension in the narrated experiences of the women, then in the women’s subject positions, and finally I discuss the implications of this tension.

Although the exclusive focus on the victimization of Darfuri women - mostly as rape victims and refugees by the media - has been criticized, there is no doubt that the militarized conflict in Darfur has resulted in horrific and wide scale violence, oppression, and personal tragedies. All of the narratives of Darfuri women that I analyzed included experiences of violence, oppression, and victimization. Rhetorically, the narratives were often powerful because of the concept of enactment; the narrators were often living proof of the violence stemming from the conflict. Common in the narratives were personal experiences of rape and brutal violence, as well as accounts of violence inflicted on their children, families, friends, and entire communities. In numerous narratives, women relayed violent experiences including multiple rapes, attacks with weapons such as sticks and clubs, degradation from their attackers, and the threat of future rapes.
Bashir (2008) described the violence and humiliation she suffered at the hands of her rapist in her autobiography, *Tears of the Desert*:

He said, ‘so now you know what rape is, you black dog. Now you know.’ The three of them took turns to rape me, one after the other. Once the third had finished, they started over again. And while doing so they burned me with their cigarettes, and cut me with their blades. They raped me until I lost consciousness. When I came to my senses I was alone in the hut. I was curled into a ball in one corner. I wished I was dead. (p. 268)

The horrific physical and emotional trauma of rape is excruciatingly clear in this description, as is the salience of ethnicity as it pertains to this conflict. Through her telling, the rapists’ perspective of her body as a gendered and racially marked object is conveyed, contrasted by her subjective voice. Like this woman, other narrators in my sample spoke of physical violence that was intertwined with ethnic and racial references. This woman spoke about the ethnic division as well as the repeated acts of violence she was forced to endure:

The war started, and they came back to hurt us. They spoke in Arabic, they said, ‘Massalit, we are going to kill you. We will use your blood.’ I also heard the Janjaweed say, ‘You dogs, we are going to kill you’...they raped them in front of us. They forced us to watch. They forced mothers to watch what was going on with their child...we went to hide ourselves. Then we came back to the village to find something to eat but the Janjaweed took everything. They saw us and they beat us and rape happened again. (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p.1)
Although many women were victims of violence and rape, the violence that the Darfuri women spoke of was not limited to the oppression of their own bodies. In addition to the horror of rape and its aftermath, many other women spoke about the devastation of their community and families. Overall, narratives that focused on witnessing and reacting to the violence inflicted on their children, families, and communities, were the most prevalent in my analysis.

Stories of burning villages, the murder of men and family members, and the suffering of children, were common to many narratives, such as this one, posted on the online forum Darfuriwomen.org:

When I returned back to the house with my mother, I found my father’s and son in law’s bodies, as well as my maternal uncle, his two daughters, and son. My father was shot in the head. Since that day I have fear inside…I never went home after that. The village was put on fire. There was nothing to return to. (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1)

Narratives such as this one convey a totalistic experience of loss and violence, which touched every corner of some women’s lives. This woman’s story illustrates both the physical destruction of the conflict and the emotional destruction of family, security, and a sense of home. Her statement, “There was nothing to return to,” painfully indicates loss on many levels. Other women also referred to loss that was experienced on a deeper level. One woman stated, “Homes can be rebuilt, but the social, psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by this violence will never heal” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p.1). Through these
narratives, it is clear that the Darfuri women were victims of the conflict in physical ways, but also in ways that were deeper and more expansive. Overall, many women depicted a holistic picture of the ways in which they were affected by the conflict’s violence beyond the violations of their own body.

The victimization and oppression conveyed in the Darfuri women’s narratives was not limited to isolated instances of brutal violence. Women also mourned the loss of their security, safety, and livelihood that they had before the conflict. Multiple women’s narratives focused on the loss of their farms and animals, and thus their livelihood. One woman described watching in horror as the Janjaweed slit the throats of all of her family’s goats. The women’s narratives also focused on the hardships of leaving their home and relocating to other villages or displacement camps. Some spoke of traveling many miles, oftentimes with small children, and under constant threat of attack. One woman described the debilitating uncertainty of her constant traveling: “Our kids almost die of hunger and cold. We are exhausted. We go here, we go there. Today is under this tree, tomorrow under that tree. That’s our situation” (Marlowe, Bain, & Shapiro, 2006, p. 50).

Related, many women’s narratives centered on the adverse conditions of the displacement camps, characterized by lack of food, water, wood for fires, medicine, schools for children, and overall safety and security. Describing life in a displacement camp, one woman stated, “I don’t have enough food for my baby...we don’t have soap...I want a machine to make flour so I can have a job” (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). This woman’s description conveys the multiple oppressions of the camps – living with inadequate resources, as well as the inability
to do anything about it. Other women also echo their frustration with the lack of resources in the camp coupled with their lack of mobility and uncertainty about the future. One woman reminisced about her previous life in Darfur as compared to her life in the camp. She said, “We had everything at home in Darfur, everything we needed. We had enough food” (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). Overall, the inability to carry out traditional roles and activities, as well as a constant sense of uncertainty about their futures and even daily survival, was a source of frustration and oppression that multiple women spoke about in their narratives.

Overall, the women’s narratives do convey horrific instances of violence, restricting oppression, and hardships experienced by themselves and others. The women speak of oppression that includes, but also exceeds, the violence inflicted on their bodies by rape. Generally, most narratives focused on the women’s loss of safety and security, rather than a specific experience of violence. Their narratives therefore show that their oppression encompasses the physical and mental aftermath of violence, the loss of children and other family members, the destruction of their homes, security, livelihoods, and communities, surviving under the poor conditions of displacement camps, and existing in a state of complete uncertainty regarding their futures.

Darfuri women, undoubtedly, are victims of this conflict, and acknowledging the physical realities of their victimization and the material consequences of patriarchal and nationalist discourses is extremely important. By making the experiences and voices of the women visible through the channel of the women’s own voices and subjectivities, we gain a more complete understanding of women’s
lives and identities, as well as the structural and ideological systems of oppression that constrains them. Additionally, by allowing the marginalized and the victimized to speak, the autonomy of such dominant systems is challenged, and may be re-imagined in more liberatory manners.

Despite, or perhaps because of their victimization, however, the narratives of Darfuri women exhibited incredible strength, leadership, and perseverance. In addition to the violence and oppression, the women’s lives are also characterized by their active strategies for survival, the risks they take to protect themselves and others, and the choices that they make regarding the future. Their narratives, therefore, reveal agency as well as victimization.

Intertwined in many narratives depicting the violence and destruction experienced and witnessed by Darfuri women were their choices, risks, and determination in the face of danger. In this sense, many women enacted both victimization and agency in the narratives. In many of the narratives, victimization led to incredible agency. Overall, the conflict required many women to assume active leadership roles. As many Darfuri men are either killed in attacks or actively fighting in the conflict, women oftentimes bear much of the communal and familial responsibilities (Martin, 2007). These assumed leadership positions were reflected in the women’s narratives. One woman stated, “Three-quarters of the men in Darfur died and the rest are on the run because of the war. The children are left with only their mothers” (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 48). Following the many descriptions of attacks, rapes, and destruction of villages in the narratives, women spoke of their efforts to keep their children alive, locate other family members, and escape
immediate threat. Women describe traveling long distances on foot to find family members and refuge from the fighting, and of protecting their children during the attacks. After her village was burned, one woman described her escape to a displacement camp: “I came on foot. Sometimes I carried my daughter in my arms, sometimes other people carried her for me. It was so difficult” (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 50). Agency is clearly demonstrated in this woman’s story through her incredible struggle to survive, her active efforts to protect her child, and her determination to reach some sort of safe(er) destination.

Many of the women’s narratives focus on their current lives in displacement camps. Through the descriptions of their struggles and the challenges of life in these camps, their agency and subjectivity is clear. Multiple women spoke about the risk of rape that they encounter when they leave the camps to find food, collect wood, or tend to their animals. For instance, one woman stated:

The organizations give us food, but it’s not enough. We work in the area, cutting dura to make flour, but we don’t have meat if we don’t work. We work in houses when it’s not raining and get leaves from dura. We clean houses for people. Wash clothes. I’m afraid I might get raped when I go into people’s houses. (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1)

Through her story and others like it, it is clear that some women are not only actively ensuring the survival of themselves and others by obtaining food, wood, and other resources, but are also making the conscious decision to risk their bodies and lives in order to do so. Multiple other women also spoke of the risks and the consequences that they endured to ensure the survival of their families. In the
online forum, statements such as “I went to get wood by the river and while I was there, they found me and raped me,” and “I went out to pasture my animals and I was raped,” were echoed in multiple narratives (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). In this sense, the women demonstrate agency by actively choosing the risk of victimization.

Beyond ensuring basic survival, some women also spoke of their efforts to improve life in the camps and repair their communities. These stories are evidence of women’s abilities to actively plan for, and make decisions about the future. An especially inspiring story described a school that some women had started for the children in one of the displacement camps:

First of all, we have only a few books for some sections. We also don’t have chairs. The teachers have been working as volunteers. We don’t have anything. We’re not even able to have lunch. But we bear this to educate our kids that are coming up after us. (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 51)

The agency conveyed through this woman’s story is remarkable. The narrative depicts women as active community leaders, making significant decisions. It illustrates the women’s choice and incredible ability to organize a functioning school in impossible, dangerous conditions with already scarce resources. It also demonstrates the women’s efforts to plan for the future of their children and for their community, and their choice to make sacrifices in order to do so. The interdependency of victimization and agency is especially clear in this narrative. While the oppressive conditions confining the women in the camp are apparent (“We don’t have anything”), this oppression elicits substantial agency and active
decision making in response. Additionally, the women’s agency, framed within the harsh and oppressive camp conditions, becomes all the more significant.

In addition to taking on leadership roles in their families and communities, many women describe struggling to overcome the physical, mental, and emotional aftermath of various personal tragedies. In her autobiography, Bashir (2008) spoke about not only recovering physically and emotionally from her rape, but her attempts to rebuild her community and help others at the same time: “I decided that my days of hiding were over, and that I wanted to do something again. A health clinic had been started in the village...I went and offered my services” (p. 277). In this narrative, Bashir takes an active role in her own recovery, as well as the recovery of others and her community in general.

The women’s ability to survive and function at a basic level, let alone in leadership roles, demonstrates incredible strength and tenacity. Some women spoke of surviving the physical injuries after rape or other violence, while others described the fear, sadness, and depression that they struggled with after violent encounters. Despite their personal traumas, multiple women expressed a determination to recover or to overcome their sadness and continue to care for their children, families, or communities.

In particular, rape victims within this conflict may face additional trauma at the hands of their family or community. Complicating both physical and emotional recovery is the strong stigma associated with rape in the Darfuri culture, and within the context of the conflict (Martin, 2007). The salient role of ethnic identity in the conflict, and the Janjaweed’s (among others) attempts to destroy or “contaminate”
the Darfuri ethnic culture by rape and impregnation, has strong consequences for the lives of women long after the rape. Multiple women said that their husbands left them, or that their families were angry with them or ignored them when they found out about the rape. For example, one woman recalled her husband’s reaction when she told him of her rape and pregnancy:

When he heard about the pregnancy, he did not come back from Libya but called on the phone. When I confirmed that I had been raped and was pregnant, he said, ‘I divorce you.’ I have not seen him since then.

(Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1)

Overall, without the support of their families or communities, especially in a patriarchal society, the effort of these women to survive and thrive must significantly increase.

Women who become pregnant by rape may face an even more impossible challenge and a greater chance of exclusion. As a physical manifestation of rape and ethnic “contamination,” babies born from rape and their mothers are often shunned or permanently marked by their community. Impregnated women therefore, face not only the challenge of delivering and raising a child in harsh and violent conditions, but also the challenge of living with her own evaluations of the trauma, as well as the evaluations of her community. Consequently, pregnant women are faced with, and make, extremely difficult decisions. While some women spoke of abandoned babies in their communities, others described their decision to raise their child. In the online forum Darfuriwomen.org, one woman said, “I am nine months pregnant. People do not ostracize me. They offer to help...I will deliver my
child and take care of it” (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). This short description calls to mind the physical, emotional, and ideological struggle that surrounds pregnancy for many raped women. This woman’s decision (along with her community’s) to deliver and care for a child of rape demonstrates incredible agency through her choice to overcome the physical and ideological challenges of the situation. Overall, this narrative demonstrates that agency can literally be born from an experience of victimization.

In sum, the content of these women’s narratives was not separated into discrete categories of either victimization or agency, but was intertwined with experiences of both. Each woman’s narrative was a textual display of the push and pull of agency and victimization, conveyed rhetorically through evidence and most significantly, enactment. Overall, the women’s choices and overall agency were clearly constrained by oppression and victimization, yet from their oppression and victimization emerged incredible agency in the form of their leadership, determination, sacrifices, decisions, and plans for the future. Paradoxically, the women’s descriptions of victimization framed their subsequent choices and experiences as momentous displays of agency.

This tension not only frames the women’s narrated experiences, but their narrative subject positions as well. The complex interdependency of victimization and agency as seen in the narrative content takes on new and expanded meanings as they interact within the women’s narrative subject positions, and the effects of the narratives themselves. Interpreted through this lens, the audience and the purpose of the narrative become especially salient and constitutive of the narrator’s subject
position or persona. The next portion of my analysis focuses on the Darfuri women’s subject positions that include victim and agent, as well as the implications of such.

Many factors contribute to the narrative positioning of Darfuri women as both agents and victims. Overall, the roles of the audience, the purpose of the narrative, and the narrator’s persona are intimately connected and constitutive of each other. Consequently, as suggested previously by Murray (2003), narrative meaning is not only constructed solely by the narrator, but is negotiated within the relationship with the listener, wider audiences, and larger social and cultural contexts. It is in this multifaceted discursive interplay that the victim/agent tension is acted out.

The co-construction of the meanings and subject positions within the women’s narratives became apparent as I expanded my analysis outward from the women’s voices themselves. First, in addition to the narrator, it was clear the interviewer shaped the narrative. For instance, while reading Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival (Marlowe et al., 2006), I began to notice a pattern of questions employed by the authors when interviewing Darfuri people. They usually asked Darfuri men about the political aspects of the war – who they thought was responsible, what solution they envisioned, and what they would say to President Omar al-Bashir if they could speak to him. With Darfuri women, however, the interviews followed a different script. Questions mainly concerned the violence that they had witnessed or experienced, and the welfare of their children. It was also clear that the purpose of many narratives shaped their meanings. Obviously the Darfuri women wanted their immediate situation to improve, which shaped how they told their stories.
Additionally, it was the purpose of many of the sources that collected the narratives to elicit some type of response from the audience to address the tragedy. For example, the online forum, Darfuriwomen.org posted women’s stories under the headline, “They spoke. We listened. You respond,” and *Darfur Diaries: Stories of Survival* opened with a preface by Paul Rusesabagina, who wrote, “My hope is that these first-person accounts of the suffering endured by the people in Darfur will bring all of us back to our duties, obligations, and responsibilities toward humankind” (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. xviii).

Finally, the larger social and cultural context also shaped the narratives. The narratives did contain descriptions of physical realities. Atrocities were happening, and they were happening to women. On a more subtle level however, discourses of gender and power shaped the narratives and the positions women held to tell them. As previously outlined by Ainsworth and Hardy (2004), discourses of power relations influence what types of narratives are acceptable and intelligible, who can tell stories, or which subject positions and stories are more powerful. As it follows, the types of subject positions that have traditionally been available to women under nationalist and patriarchal discourses are: passive, vulnerable, private, emotional, mother, etc. (Enloe, 1989). Particularly in the context of militarized conflicts and political movements, women’s voices are largely marginalized, or limited to victim, or to the category of “vulnerable women and children” (Fung, 2005). It is within this discursive context that the interviewers asked Darfuri women about their experiences of victimization and their children rather than their political opinions – these were the stories deemed intelligible by traditional gendered discourses. It is
within this discursive context that human rights organizations and other sources published women's voices to elicit empathy, outrage, and response from larger audiences – women as vulnerable victims in need of protection are accepted subject positions. And it is within this discursive context that women themselves assume the subject position of victim, at least partially, in their narratives in order to tell their stories, and to be heard.

The simple categorization of the Darfuri women’s narrative subject position or persona as ‘victim’ is troubled however, when we return to Ainsworth and Hardy’s (2004) statement concerning dominant discourses and intelligible stories. Their claim that dominant discourses shape which subject positions and stories are more intelligible, acceptable, and powerful, reveals how the role of victim might be imbued with agency. In this sense, the vulnerable victim subject position or narrative persona can allow Darfuri women access to dominant discourses, give them a credible voice, and thus allow for more agency and subjectivity, and perhaps subversive potential.

Therefore, in addition to rendering an individual powerless, the subject position of ‘victim’ can also result in power and agency. Deriving agency from a victim subject position is particularly evident in the letter from multiple Darfuri women to the African Union and Arab League. The women begin by establishing their subject position as victims:

The most vulnerable among us, women and children, have often paid the greatest price. Each of us has her own story, and each story should be acknowledged, each crime we have suffered from accounted for. The 25-
year-old women who was raped in front of her two children by a man carrying a gun. Badly beaten, she lay on the side of the road for nine days. She was too scared to tell her husband. The 17-year-old who was chased down, bitten on her arm and neck to mark her as compromised, and then raped by a man in uniform. The woman who, seven months pregnant, was robbed, beaten, and gang-raped along with her six companions. They were hoping to gather firewood to earn money to feed their families. They returned to their camp naked and brutalized. (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 1)

The women explicitly position themselves as “the most vulnerable among us,” and subsequently support this categorization by enumerating a tragic list of personal stories of victimization. As victims of these crimes, the women are now in the logical position to demand accountability. Subsequently, the women conclude with a demand for justice:

The women and children of Darfur deserve justice, they deserve the chance to hold those responsible to account, they deserve to be treated, at last, with dignity...We urge the international community to continue to support the pursuit of justice for the victims of Darfur. With justice we will build the road back to peace. (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 1)

This narrative clearly demonstrates the complexities of being victim and agent at once. Only through positioning themselves as victims could the women claim such authority and construct such a powerful demand for justice and peace. As victims of the conflict, Darfuri women have an unquestionably credible voice, an ethical platform from which to demand change and justice, and therefore a central
social forum from which to speak and be heard. As previously discussed, within traditional gendered discourses, and especially in times of conflict, women are positioned as passive and vulnerable, and are therefore often placed in the category of innocent ‘women and children ’ in many conflict discourses and media narratives (Thompson et al., 2007). Therefore, a victim subject position gives the voices and narratives of Darfuri women indisputable credibility and morality. As innocent, vulnerable victims, there can be no counterargument, justification, or discrediting of the violence and hardships that are storied by the women.

Related, as innocent victims of the larger conflict, Darfuri women have a powerful ethical platform from which to demand change and justice. In many narratives women used the victimization they had experienced to ask for help, call for change, and demand justice. For instance, one woman said, “Tell people about how much we suffered in Darfur when we were attacked. They took our property, killed many people, and took our land. Sometimes in the night, I think about what happened and start to cry” (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). In this narrative, the woman’s suffering and victimization serves as the basis and justification for the visibility and weight of her voice, indicated by her request for the interviewer to use her voice in order to “tell people.”

Overall, in the victim subject position, these women’s voices become authoritative, credible, and ethical, and are recognized as such by many audiences. Most importantly, the women’s narrative appeals for justice, peace, accountability, or aid in general allowed by their victim subject position, if answered, serve as a powerful source to alter their material conditions. This possibility is illustrated by
another quotation from the previous letter. The Darfuri women say, “No one is above justice, and no one can be responsible for killing and dehumanizing so many without consequence” (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 1). This section of the narrative clearly uses their victimization and dehumanization as the catalyst for justice and for future consequences for the perpetrators and thus the overall conflict.

In this way, through a victim subject position, the Darfuri women gain the ability and agency to speak and be heard, and possibly contribute to altering their material conditions and the overall conflict. This possibility to alter their material conditions is discussed further in the subsequent section focusing on resistance and control.

This rhetorical space allowed by the women’s victimized subject positions is a significant implication of these tensions. Despite potentially reproducing (and reflecting) the dominant discourse that positions women as victims, passive, vulnerable and national mothers, this subject position has at least created a discursive or rhetorical space for Darfuri women’s voices, and with it comes power and visibility. Similar narratives have become a central component of the conflict and appeals for humanitarian aid and political solutions (Kapur, 2002). Accounts have been used in the international criminal court testimonies, featured in international media and humanitarian reports, published in novels, chronicled in documentaries, and appeared in online forums. Overall, narratives concerning the victimization of Darfuri women have been used as evidence and as persuasion regarding the need for personal, political, and international response and aid.
concerning the conflict (Haeri, 2008; Murphy, 2007). Ironically then, the visibility and potential effects of women’s victimization in narratives similar to those found in my sample, challenges the traditional passive role that women supposedly hold.

Without disregarding the ways in which Darfuri women’s voices have been shaped by and shaped into traditional meta-narratives and used for various motives, their victim subject position, in part, allowed their voices to enter meaningfully into the dominant social discourse. As previously discussed, feminist thought holds that our social world is defined and understood through a masculine lens, and therefore women and other marginalized members of society are systematically silenced and devalued, which leads to an incomplete understanding of our world and social relations (Harding, 1987). Stories of Darfuri women’s victimization, although in line with a patriarchal, nationalist meta-narrative, have created a space for their experiences and voices, which would otherwise not be heard or accounted for. Cyclically, as more women’s voices and experiences are heard, more become accepted and elicited, expanding the discourse. Furthermore, and most importantly, as no meaning is completely fixed and no discourse is totally self-contained (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996), the discursive space created by the women as victims has the potential to foster new, subversive meanings, identities, and experiences that challenge or reframe the dominant discourse or meta-narrative. Therefore, the act of making Darfuri women’s experiences heard is significant in itself, however, the potential for this discursive space to support and cultivate subversive meanings is vital to a more complete understanding of our social world.
and of the conflict. Further discussion regarding the ways in which the narratives in my analysis challenge dominant meanings follows in the next section.

In sum, the tensions of agency and victimization are especially complex in the negotiation of the Darfuri women’s narrative subject positions. In most of the narratives that I analyzed, the Darfuri women do narrate from a primary subject position or persona of ‘victim.’ On one hand, this positionality stems from co-constructed meanings, which both reflect and reproduce dominant gendered discourses and power relations. These are the stories and subject positions most intelligible. On the other hand, this victim subject position is much more nuanced and less self-contained than at first glance, and can be understood as a source of agency.

This complex dance between an agent and victim subject has significant implications for the narratives, and thus for the understandings of the conflict itself. The overarching result of the previously discussed tensions is the formation of a comprehensive moral argument. As explained by Lewis (2005), moral inclination is a definitive characteristic of narratives, citing narrative form as inherently moral in that it leads to a particular ending that defines the moral frame of the story, and characters and events are placed in position to that purpose. Narratives based on the moral standards of the audience thus shape interpretation by emphasizing the moral dimensions of human understanding (Lewis, 2005). In this fashion, the Darfuri women’s victim subject position gives cohesive meaning to the narratives themselves, and thus to the understanding of the conflict in general, by creating a moral argument that various audiences can identify with and take part in.
Therefore, as the previously discussed aspects of the victim subject position powerfully coalesce into a moral argument, the women’s narratives gain the rhetorical and persuasive power to not only frame their own experiences, but the entire conflict as well.

Narration from a victim subject position can powerfully frame the conflict as a battle between good and evil, imbuing the conflict and audiences with a clear moral direction. Other aspects of the conflict are transcended with a greater appeal for human dignity and goodness, symbolized by the suffering of innocents. As such, the most powerful appeal and moral argument come from those positioned as innocent, passive, and vulnerable, which are traditionally most closely associated with women and children, as discussed previously. In this position, all of the oppressive experiences of the Darfuri women consequently added to the moral argument even when the connections were not explicit. Many narratives featured a sentiment of ‘why us’ conveying innocence and underserved suffering. Particularly significant to the overall moral argument, however, seemed to be the association or relationship between women and children. Therefore, Darfuri women’s positions as mothers, in addition to victims, played an especially salient moral role in many narratives. Multiple narratives featured women speaking about the suffering of their children, or of women and children in general. For instance, one woman described the nightmares that her children suffered from:

All the kids dream at night and cry. When you ask they why they say the planes come. Some of them wake up and run. When you stop them and ask
them why they say because the soldiers are coming to beat me. (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 53)

Another woman described the attack of a school and the systematic rape of all of the little girls that were students there. Still others spoke of the lack of food in the displacement camps and their children’s malnutrition. Explicit descriptions of the suffering of women and children were especially powerful. In *Tears of the Desert*, Bashir described witnessing the aftermath of an attack:

One terrible day a distraught mother arrived with her two small boys. One was nine years old and one was just six, and their little bodies were horribly burned. I asked her what had happened. The Janjaweed had attacked her village. The boy’s father had been gunned down in front of them, his sons being thrown into the burning hut alive. As I cleaned and dressed their burns, they were screaming for their mother and begging me to stop. I felt hot tears of pain and rage welling up in my eyes. My heart died inside. (Bashir, 2008, p. 213)

This heartbreakingly description paints a graphic picture of innocent suffering that is in conflict with the collective moral code of humanity (or that of “good” humanity). The emotional relationship between the boys and their mother is also prevalent, conveying the mother’s unconditional love for her children and thus her parallel suffering. Additionally, the narrator’s description of her own response echoes the audience’s appropriate moral reaction – rage, pain, and heartbreak. This narrative is an exemplar of the moral argument that many women construct to frame the conflict. Those who harm innocent women and children are aligned with
evil or the devil, and God or goodness is placed alongside the victims. This frame is clearly articulated by Bashir (2008): “They are like the devil, but they are weak. God is strong. He will destroy them, they attack children, like the cowards they are. But one day God will finish them all” (p. 214). This frame is so powerful in that the victimization of innocent women and children breaks a strong moral code held by the majority of the global society. This collective moral code is directly referred to following the narrator’s disturbing descriptions: “How could people be so evil? They were adults and these were little children...did they have no heart, no innocence, no adult's love for a child? Where they really even human?” (Bashir, 2008, p. 214). The narrator’s clear categorizations of good and evil positions the conflict and its characters in a set moral direction. Such narratives are therefore defined by their powerful identification with audiences’ collective moral standards, based upon disgust of innocent suffering and a collective love for children, made especially salient through a mother’s eyes.

Overall, the Darfuri women’s victim subject position and association with innocent children through their roles as mothers, or simply the category “women and children,” create a powerful moral argument that is used to frame their narratives, as well as the conflict in general. This positionality creates a conflict between good and evil that transcends all other concerns with an appeal to human dignity and a rejection of evil. In this transcendent moral narrative, women’s voices as victims thus become the most powerful and unquestionable, again revealing the complexities of victimization and agency. Similarly, in this subject position they have affected the understanding of the conflict by giving it a strong moral interpretation
and direction. Thus, their voices can be viewed as an influential factor in constituting the appropriate moral response and reaction to the conflict on various levels. This moral argument and its influence is informed by the physical realities of the conflict, but is also made more powerful in its reproduction of patriarchal positionalities of women. Consequently, the women’s narrative subject positions are characterized by dynamic tensions of power, contradicting meanings, and in general a complex and paradoxical relationship between victimization and agency, subjectivity and objectivity.

In sum, this section of my analysis explored the dynamic, contradictory, and interdependent nature of victimization and agency in Darfuri women’s narratives. Overall, this process shed light upon my first two research questions, which asked, how do the Darfuri women’s narratives change or enhance our understandings of the conflict, of Darfuri women, and of women in general? And, in what ways do the Darfuri women’s narratives both subvert and reproduce gendered positions found in dominant discourses? First, the Darfuri women’s narratives have complicated and enhanced understandings of the conflict and the women’s roles by illustrating seldom heard experiences and voices, by discussing experiences of victimization that extend beyond an isolated act of rape, and by illustrating instances of agency in addition to simply victimization. Their narratives revealed the unimaginative agency, choices, and leadership that sprung from their extreme victimization.

Second, this section illustrated how traditional gendered positionalities of women were both reproduced and subverted through the interactions between victimization and agency. The narratives revealed that their co-constructed subject
positionalities can derive much power and influence from victimization, yet simultaneously reproduces constraining patriarchal and nationalist discourses. Furthermore, as a moral narrative, Darfuri women’s subject positions as victims can influence the appropriate direction and understanding of the conflict by creating a strong moral identification with audience members, but an identification that hinges on women and children as innocent and vulnerable, and one that perhaps simplifies the conflict and the full range of human characteristics. As victims, Darfuri women are in an active and powerful position to demand a rightful voice in the application of justice, peace, and perhaps the subsequent re-building after the conflict. This position has the potential to renegotiate traditional roles and understandings of women at the same time it risks their reproduction.

The next and final section of my analysis explores a different, yet related set of tensions apparent in the narratives of Darfuri women – control and resistance. The roles of control and resistance in the narratives demonstrate the ways in which agency, meanings, and identities are both constrained and enabled by the discursive and material contexts. As in the previous section, I examine the tensions of control and resistance that are revealed in both the content of the women’s narratives, as well as in the broader work that these stories accomplish, including the significant implications of these tensions.

Control and Resistance: Complicating Understandings of Darfuri Women’s Experiences, Identities, and Choices

Foucault’s (1979) well-known proposition concerning the interconnected nature of power and resistance seems to be an appropriate place to begin my
discussion of control and resistance in the Darfuri women’s narratives. As discussed previously, patriarchal and nationalist discourses as well as the specific and situated contexts of the conflict and Darfuri culture do constrain and control available subject positions and material consequences for Darfuri women. As explained by Holmer-Nadesan (1996) however, no discourse or meaning is completely fixed or self-contained. Resistance, therefore, is understood as an individual’s capacity to draw upon alternate discourses or a “surplus” of meaning, which therefore destabilizes the autonomy of the dominant discourse. Resistance consequently challenges the dominant system of social values and identities. Overall, the extreme exertion of control and oppression that characterizes the Darfuri conflict and the narratives of Darfuri women have resulted in resistance, and thus new and emergent meaning and identities. Just as with victimization and agency, control and resistance exist within the narratives in complex, interdependent, and sometimes contradictory ways.

The element of control is the most apparent, and most publicized (Murphy, 2007) aspect of many narratives concerning Darfuri women. Likewise, in my analysis, the various ways in which the women’s bodies, identities, and lives were manipulated and controlled was a significant aspect in many of their narratives. This control is palpable when considered within the patriarchal and nationalist discourses discussed in the literature review, as well as in the situated context of the conflict. Nationalist discourses confine women’s acceptable positions largely to that of cultural and biological reproducers of the nation. Women are therefore symbolic
of national space, purity, health, and pride, ultimately leading to their characterization as passive, vulnerable, and open to exploitation (Mostov, 2000).

Compounding such a nationalist discourse with the entrenchment of gender roles that accompanies most armed conflicts, as well as the salience of racial and ethnic identity particular to this conflict, has lead to extreme consequences for Darfuri women. Consistent with this discourse, the systematic rape of Darfuri women has been attributed to efforts of ethnic cleansing, and as a war tactic to destroy the culture and ethnic purity of the Darfuri people (Martin, 2007). While the conflict is steeped in a long history of bitter struggles over power, resources, and rights, it has evolved (and been perpetuated by the government and others) into a conflict pitting two racial identities against each other: the Islamic government and affiliated Arab-identifying Janjaweed, and the African cultures of Darfur and elsewhere (Deng, 2006). As such, the Darfuri women’s gendered and racial/ethnic identities serve as a means for oppression, objectification, and control in a conflict characterized by nationalism and racial divide.

Each woman’s narrative that described rape or other abuse gave testament to this control and objectification. It was clear in many cases that the women lacked both the physical and the ideological power to resist such instances of control and oppression. For instance, one woman said:

When they shot my father, they saw I was a little girl. I did not have any energy or force against them. They used me...no one helped me. My sisters saw me after the rape. They were angry, and did not say anything.

(Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p.1)
This narrative illustrates the lack of power that the women had in the conflict as well as in their familial and communal systems. Some women also directly referenced the role that their racial and gendered identities played in their victimization. For instance, Bashir relayed this conversation she had with a rape victim:

For two hours they held the school, they abused the girls in front of their friends, forcing them to watch what they were doing. Any girls who tried to resist were beaten about the head with sticks or rifle butts. ‘Before they left, they spat on us and urinated on us,’ Sumiah whispered. ‘They said, we will let you live so you can tell your mothers and fathers and brothers what we did to you. Tell them from us: if you stay, the same and worse will happen to you all. Next time, we will show no mercy. Leave this land, Sudan is for the Arabs. It is not for black dogs and slaves.’ (Bashir, 2008, p. 258)

This narrative conveys elements of control and objectification on multiple levels. On a fundamental level, the girls’ gendered bodies were positioned as an object available for rape and invasion by the attackers. Additionally, the nationalist and racial constraints binding women were also referenced. The attackers’ demand to “tell your mothers and father and brothers what we did to you,” clearly positions the girls as passive national objects used for transmitting messages in the larger battle between groups of men. Related, their constraining role as the physical marker of national/racial identity is conveyed when the attackers tell them to “leave this land, Sudan is for the Arabs.” Furthermore, as symbolic and physical national markers, the shame, humiliation, and invasion of rape becomes relevant not only in
the immediate act, but in the stigma that it leaves behind. This type of permanent control and objectification is conveyed in the narrative when the narrator speaks of other girls being made to watch the rapes, and of the attackers’ decision to allow the girls to live and return to their families and communities.

The shame and stigma referenced in the previous narrative describes the more subtle and invisible control that women were often subjected to following the immediacy of the attacks. Therefore, not only were their bodies positioned as vulnerable and effective sites for invasion by various enemies, but also, as symbols of national purity, pride, and health, their raped bodies became a source of national shame, suspicion, and defilement. Consequently, many raped Darfuri women faced abandonment, anger, and further humiliation from their family and community members (Martin, 2007). Rather than risk this response and permanent stigma, many women chose to suffer, recover, and live in silence. The restricting control of rape’s stigma and silence is illustrated in this woman’s story:

I was raped in the camp in 2007 by a man with a knife at night. I am very sad. I told this to the sheikha, but they didn’t find the man who did it. My new husband doesn’t know that this happened to me. (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1)

Multiple narratives in my analysis did indeed reference the various ways in which the rape continued to control and influence their lives after the actual act. While some, like the woman above, stated that they had kept their rape a secret, others spoke of their husbands divorcing them, or being shunned from their families and communities. Still others referenced the general sadness, depression, and
shame that they continued to experience. In an especially distressing narrative, one woman described her life after her rape like this:

After the attack I returned home, I told my family and they are very angry with me. They know I am pregnant and they kicked me out of the house. My uncle followed me to the pasture one day and cut off all my hair... after the man raped me, my family would not eat with me. They treated me like a dog and I had to eat alone. (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1)

Through her family’s anger, abandonment and even physical abuse, it is clear that the control and objectification that stem from her gendered identity permeate enemy and allied lines. Narratives such as this demonstrate that the constraints that control the Darfuri women’s lives are systematic and continuous, stemming not necessarily from the act of violence itself, but rather from their constraining positions in dominant patriarchal and nationalist discourses coupled with the material consequences of the conflict.

Overall, the women’s narratives convey significant and horrific examples of the ways in which the values and identities of dominant discourses constrain and control the meanings and the material consequences of their lives. Their narratives, however, also show instances of resistance and challenges to dominant discourses. In these extreme instances of control and objectification, Darfuri women chose meanings, identities, and actions from alternate discourses. Evidencing the complex, interdependent nature of control and resistance, alternate meanings, identities, and actions might have not been as necessary without the oppressing control made
salient by the conflict. In other words, control breeds resistance and the need for alternate discourses, threatening its own destruction.

Multiple narratives described elements of resistance, many of which have been previously addressed in my analysis of the women's incredible agency. For instance, the women's descriptions of risking their safety to get food, water, wood, and other resources, and of continuously protecting their families and children demonstrates resistance to the immediate threat of physical violence and starvation that threatens to control their existence. Additionally, in the previous narrative describing a school that was organized by women in the displacement camp, one woman explained the school’s goal: “I want to teach them so they become doctors and engineers and can grow in their country. Give them a good education so they can benefit” (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 53). This woman’s hopes and goals demonstrate resistance to the attackers’ attempted destruction of their communities and futures. Additionally, the women’s roles in educating their children and ensuring their success and their potential significant roles in their society, resists the passive positioning of women and children.

As discussed previously, due to the ethno-nationalist nature of this conflict and how it has been dichotomized (Arabs versus Blacks), ethnic identity has taken on very salient and controlling discursive and physical roles. This salience was reflected in multiple narratives in my sample. In particular, women oftentimes ascribed blame to the “Arabs” or the “Janjaweed,” thus describing their experiences within the dominant nationalist discourse and dichotomizing an ethnic ‘other.’ Although most women’s narratives did reproduce this ethnic division, a few
narratives did illustrate resistance of the limited gender and ethnic/racial roles dictated by the conflict and dominant discourses, by placing blame on the government or Darfur’s president instead of generalizing blame across ethnicities. For instance, one woman referenced the government’s power instead of the Arab ethnic group as the party responsible for the conflict: “This horror was the government’s doing; it had been sanctioned by the rulers in Khartoum” (Bashir, 2008, p. 265).

In these instances, the government’s efforts to divide people based on race and ethnic culture, and to entrench nationalist loyalties, created solidarity across racial divisions. The widespread suffering caused by the conflict created a larger community (especially for women) connected by their common suffering, and as such, defies nationalist and racial boundaries. This rejection of a strict nationalist identity based solely on race or ethnicity is demonstrated in this woman’s narrative:

The sorrow that happens in America, Sudan, England is all the same. I pray that whatever happened to us doesn’t happen to them. The women in Arab countries, we are their sisters. We speak the same Arab tongue. We have problems we’ve never faced before. I wish that they feel our problems and take one stand with us together. (Marlowe et al., 2006, p. 52)

This woman rejects the racial dichotomy that is commonly used to frame the conflict, and generally resists a limited conception of identity that hinges on race or geographic location. She instead uses identification with suffering and hardships to create a larger community that includes Arab women as well as black women like herself, challenging the dominant meanings that control the conflict’s framing.
Despite efforts to control meanings and ethnic identities in ways beneficial to those in power, this woman resisted reproducing those meanings and instead drew on alternate discourses, thus creating a subversive frame of the conflict. Overall, this narrative demonstrates that efforts to fix meanings are always met with resistance and the emergence of new understandings.

In a similar fashion, other narratives illustrate the ways in which Darfuri women resist having their lives controlled and dictated by the shame and stigma that can accompany rape. As previously discussed, Darfuri women’s positionalities within dominant nationalist discourses can be seen as an element of control as illustrated in the immediate act of rape, as well as in the shame and stigma that surrounds the act. The control of the shame to silence women, cause their husbands to divorce them, their families to shun them, and inspire communal anger and humiliation, is expected and taken advantage of by their attackers. Some women’s narratives, however, describe their resistance to this traditional script and their rejection of this shamed, victimized identity. For instance, the previously discussed woman’s narrative that stated her commitment to deliver and raise her baby conceived through rape demonstrates a tangible example of resisting the shame and stigma of rape and attempts to “pollute” their culture. Additionally, the woman’s claim that her community and family helped her, rather than ostracized her, illustrated a wider, communal rejection of the dominant discourse’s positioning of women as the individuals to blame for the invasion and humiliation of the nation, culture, or community. Bashir articulates such a rejection of women as the shamed and blameworthy party after rape:
Better to have died and preserved one’s dignity, than to have suffered the soul death of rape – that’s what the Massalit, and the Zaghawa, believed. But I was having none of that. As far as I was concerned, every single woman and child in that room was a victim. For what could they possibly have done to resist? (Bashir, 2008, p. 259)

Paradoxically, in labeling the women and children as defenseless victims, Bashir uses their lack of resistance to resist the logic of blame and shame that was oftentimes placed upon raped women. Overall, these narratives demonstrate both individual and communal decisions to draw on alternate discourses and resist the attackers’ attempts to destroy a community through rape.

On a more abstract level, some women also spoke about their personal, emotional struggle to eschew or resist the shroud of silence and shame threatening to define their identities and lives. In these instances, the women resisted this control by drawing on alternate identities rather than settling for the ones provided in the conflict’s dominant discourses. Some women resisted the blame and shame by identifying themselves as blameless victims, as seen in the previous narrative, while others spoke about being survivors and using their experiences to help other women in their situation. Others, such as Bashir, generally rejected that raped women should be saddled with shame and silence:

Once I started talking, I began to feel better about it. It was good to be doing this, knowing that my words might have an effect. Perhaps it gave some meaning to all that I had suffered...I didn’t give a damn what anyone thought and I didn’t give a damn about the shame. (Bashir, 2008, p. 343)
Bashir directly states her dis-identification with the shamed, silenced rape victim, through her sentiment, “I didn’t give a damn about the shame.” Furthermore, she resists its control by the very act of her speaking and telling her story. Therefore, through both her rhetorical rejection of the dominant discourse’s identities and values and her physical act of speaking, she takes part in destabilizing the dominant discourse’s control.

Significantly, the previous narrative includes the narrator’s reflections on how her story and voice might have an effect and give meaning to her suffering on a larger level. This reflection illustrates how control and resistance can be experienced and understood at individual levels, but also at broader levels and contexts by shaping collective meanings and effects. This reflection therefore transitions my analysis to a consideration of the narrative interaction of control and resistance on a broader level, and the general implications stemming from this tension. On this broader level, resistance can be understood through the ability of the Darfuri women’s narratives to influence meanings and affect the discursive context of the conflict. Thus, the discursive presence or social platform from which Darfuri women’s voices and experiences are spoken and recognized, defies the dominant paradigm of control, passivity, and silence. The women’s conscious and risky choice to make their voices heard, and to tell their stories to people from humanitarian organizations, interviewers, individuals making documentaries, reporters, and other audiences, illustrates a significant act of resisting the control of their immediate material and discursive contexts. In the realization that their voices would be carried beyond their limited contexts and possibly be heard by wider
audiences, the women are taking advantage of a powerful rhetorical space. It is through such rhetorical space that the women may potentially affect dominant discourses regarding the conflict and their positions within it.

Accordingly, overarching the individual displays of resistance in the women’s narratives is the ability of the narratives themselves to resist the control and dominance present within the conflict. As discussed previously, the Darfuri women’s experiences of violent control and thus their victimized subject positions created a powerful, authoritative, and moral social platform and discursive presence from which to make their voices heard. The multiple sources and mediums in which I found the narratives for my analysis were a testament to the broad reach and power of their voices. The women themselves were also aware of the larger effects of their narratives, and the possible influence of outside forces. For instance, one woman stated, “I hope that you will take this information to America and tell important people,” while another began her narrative with, “Tell people about how much we suffered in Darfur…” (Darfuriwomen.org, 2009, p. 1). Consequently, in the act of speaking and being heard by an international audience, the women’s narratives were able to accomplish powerful acts of resistance by influencing broad understandings of the conflict, and thus potentially affecting their own material situations.

As my analysis previously discussed, from victim subject positions, Darfuri women were able to create a moral argument that framed understandings of the conflict in transcendent terms of good and evil. Positioned as innocent victims, vulnerable women, and anguished mothers, their narratives identified with a
strongly held collective moral code, and thus served as a powerful appeal for human dignity and the halt of innocent suffering. This moral component demonstrated in my analysis is also evidenced by the use of similar narratives by various human rights organizations, international criminal courts, and other political proceedings as reason for intervention, justice, and peace negotiations (Haeri, 2008). It therefore seems plausible that their voices within this rhetorical space could have influenced international understandings of the conflict, and in doing so, have also actively affected their own situations and futures by potentially spurring international aid and intervention. This potential for meaning making and material effects is echoed in the women’s own voices. Upon deciding to tell her story, Bashir’s states, “It was good to be doing this, knowing that my words might have an effect” (Bashir, 2008, p. 343). The co-construction of their voices and stories by various audiences and discourses is of course central to this meaning-making process. The point I would like to emphasize, however, is that the same positionalities of the Darfuri women that were a means of control, oppression, and victimization in the conflict, were also conversely a means of broader resistance. As their voices gained rhetorical space and entered into international discourses, and thus shaped understandings of the conflict and their material situations, their narratives ultimately resisted and transcended the immediate control and oppression of the conflict.

Additionally, the social presence of the women’s narratives not only resisted the control exerted by the conflict itself, but the control of traditional roles and identities of women in general. As stated previously, the discursive space gained largely through adhering to traditional gendered roles controlled by dominant
discourses can be viewed as reproducing these constricting gendered social relationships, but also as making room for emergent meanings. The discursive entry of women’s voices and experiences is itself an accomplishment, but the potential for the emergence of subversive meanings accrued by this space, is extremely significant. In the presence of competing discourses and alternate meanings, subversive roles, identities, and experiences of women can continue to emerge dynamically, and thus challenge the autonomy of more dominant discourses (patriarchy, nationalism, those surrounding the Darfuri conflict). Furthermore, as women’s voices and experiences gain more discursive space, additional and more subversive voices and experiences can be discursively heard and imagined in a cyclical process.

The narratives in my analysis give testament to this possibility and expansion of meaning. The exploration of only a few narratives by Darfuri women has illustrated various ways in which their experiences, identities, and actions can, and have, challenged and resisted dominant discourses concerning the conflict and women in general. From organizing schools, to risking their bodies for the well being of others, to raising children born from rape, to demanding justice, to simply telling their stories, the narratives of Darfuri women in my analysis illustrate the potential to widen understandings of the conflict, of Darfuri women, and of women in general. Although the narratives used in my analysis were not the most ubiquitous or widely familiar to Western audiences (in comparison to those in popular media), they nonetheless point to the international presence of the
women's voices - voices that can subvert traditional meanings, and voices that could possibly be incorporated into more mainstream discourses.

On a more practical level, the discursive presence of Darfuri women’s voices could potentially challenge and change their own communities or cultures and their roles within them. With an international audience and an authoritative and ethical subject position as victims, Darfuri women could hold a powerful position as their country and communities are rebuilt. As the most wronged-party in the conflict, Darfuri women are in an influential place to speak and be heard about justice, accountability, peace negotiations, solutions, and rebuilding their communities. The letter written by a group of Darfuri women conveys the powerful links between their voices, their victimization, and their authority:

As women of Darfur, we are grateful that our sisters are not forgotten. We are grateful that their stories are heard, their suffering accounted for, their rights acknowledged. We urge the international community to continue to support the pursuit of justice for the victims of Darfur. With justice we will build the road back to peace. (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 1)

This narrative segment clearly connects the women’s collective suffering with the authority to demand human rights, justice, and accountability. Consequently, the women have a say in the future of Darfur and the way in which “the road back to peace” should be built. This passage exemplifies the potential that the women’s narratives have to subvert the public/private gendered dichotomy, and expand women’s positions, roles, and voices into those that are more active, public, and political. Although the process of rebuilding Darfur and the lives of those
affected will obviously be an extremely slow, difficult, and complex process, as would rebuilding deeply entrenched gender roles and dominant discourses, I believe that narratives such as the one above show at least the possibility of resisting and renegotiating women’s roles in Darfur and elsewhere.

Overall, the discursive presence of Darfuri women’s voices through their narratives can be seen as an overarching act of resistance with the potential to challenge both the immediate control of the conflict’s material contexts, as well as ideological control of women’s identities, voices, and roles. Although their subject positions in this discursive space may reproduce and reflect controlling gendered positionalities, it also allowed for a social presence, and thus the power to influence the conflict and the potential for dynamic, subversive meanings to emerge. The violent ideological and physical control within the conflict necessitated and fostered resistance and resulted in an international platform from which the Darfuri women could speak and be heard. Consequently, in the presence of an international audience, the Darfuri women’s narratives not only reproduced meaning and understanding, but also expanded and challenged it as well.

In sum, the final section of my analysis explored the specific and also the broader narrative interactions of control and resistance. This section reveals further insight regarding my first two research questions. Analysis of control and resistance within the narratives complicated and enhanced understandings of the conflict and Darfuri women by rejecting a limited consideration of the ways in which the women’s bodies and lives are controlled by the conflict, and instead exploring the spaces and strategies that women use to resist the control exerted by their physical
surroundings and experiences. Additionally, the ways in which Darfuri women resisted the discursive control of patriarchal or nationalist definitions sheds light on my second research question inquiring about the subversion and reproduction of gendered positions. Although in many ways the women's lives and voices were defined and controlled by patriarchal and gendered identities, these same identities gained the women rhetorical space, and thus the potential to influence change, which challenges the traditional view of women as solely vulnerable, passive, and controlled.

Related, this section also shed light on the my final research question, in which I asked, in what ways do the women's narratives represent the possibility for the transformation of social relationships? This section of my analysis illustrated the ways in which resistance, potential for new meanings, and subversive discourses can emerge despite the powerful constraints of entrenched control. Furthermore, as additional marginalized meanings and voices emerge, so might more liberatory and empowering understandings of social relationships. Although such subversive meanings and voices must struggle against ingrained and interconnected dominant discourses, the possibility and discursive space for their emergence is present, as demonstrated through the Darfuri women’s narratives. This discursive space and potential for subversive meanings therefore points to the potential for social change or transformation through a more complete and inclusive understanding of social relationships in general and of the conflict in particular.

Overall, the women’s narratives illustrated the ways in which control and resistance interact on a material and ideological level in dynamic and complex ways,
which are continuously negotiated and co-constructed. A discussion of the previously discussed tensions and their larger significance to academic literature, my project’s goals, and social practice is the focus of the following, concluding section of my project.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion and Project Contributions

My analysis opened with a reflection about conflict. Indeed, this concept has seemed to appear in every aspect of my project: The political struggle in Sudan. The violent fighting in Darfur. Incompatible gender roles Competing voices. Ideological power struggles. Contradictory meanings. Furthermore, such conflicting conceptualizations are often placed in dichotomous contradictions, each defined by its opposition to the other. In this light, conflict has typically been categorized as a negative, destructive, and dualistic concept. And it can be. Violence, destruction, and oppression categorize the conflict in Darfur. Systematic silence, control, and domination characterize the ideological power struggles between dominant and subordinate discourses and identities.

However, the meaning of conflict can also be understood in different (conflicting) ways, which defy simplistic categorizations or evaluations. Conflict can also yield creativity, resistance, agency, subversive meanings, and new identities (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2009). My project, and the narratives of Darfuri women have contributed to such a reconsideration of conflict. As my analysis illustrated, the Darfuri women’s narratives were not monologist or able to be neatly categorized into dichotomies, but were fraught with the complex interaction and interdependency of multiple tensions, discourses, and voices. In this sense, the separation and dualistic nature of conflict was replaced by convolution and interdependency. For instance, at the same time the conflict in Darfur resulted in violent oppression and control, it created a discursive space and moral platform
from which Darfuri women’s experiences could be voiced and heard. Similarly, the Darfuri women’s harsh victimization was defined by incredible acts of agency and the creation of new outlets to influence and renegotiate their material and ideological positions. Likewise, the oppressive control informed by nationalist and patriarchal dominant discourses necessitated resistance and spurred the emergence of new meanings, identities, and roles. Therefore, as seen through the Darfuri women’s narratives, a simplistic, static, and dualistic understanding of conflict is redefined and expanded into an interdependent, complex, contradictory, and dynamic relationship, characterized by tensions that are never fully resolved or fixed, but continue to change, emerge and reveal themselves in new ways. Overall, it is through this re-conceptualization of contradiction, conflict, and tension, that my analysis of the Darfuri women’s narratives can contribute to the understandings surrounding the Sudanese conflict, Darfuri women, and women in general. These contributions, framed by my original research question, are the focus on this concluding chapter.

**How do the Darfuri women’s narratives change or enhance understandings of the conflict, of Darfuri women, and of women in general?**

On a broad level, my analysis contributed to understandings of the conflict in general in that it focused on the personal voices and experiences of Darfuri women from a different, more nuanced angle than often seen in the news media or imagined from dominant, masculine discourses concerning militarized conflict. In privileging the voices and experiences of women involved in the conflict, and seeking out voices and experiences that challenge the traditional roles offered by a nationalist or
patriarchal narrative, my analysis contested a more singular, masculine conceptualization of the conflict. Instead of portraying Darfuri women’s experiences that consist of one isolated, violent act of rape, as much of the popular media does, my analysis explores a more holistic and complex view of their experiences and identities. In this sense, in addition to viewing women as rape victims and passive symbols through a patriarchal, nationalist discourse, the women’s narratives demonstrated ways in which agency, resistance, and even power can supplement the former positions. Related, by employing a feminist, critical lens, my project recognizes and focuses on the ways in which gender both shapes and is reflected in the conflict, in ways that often go undetected or unexamined. Therefore, the limited positionalities afforded to women by nationalism and patriarchy can be expanded and challenged by privileging women’s voices.

Overall, exploring the conflict from the narrative perspectives and experiences of Darfuri women accomplishes a more inclusive, complex view of the conflict - one that is characterized by multiple realities, perspectives, experiences, and voices. For example, in addition to reproducing the Arab/African dualism that usually frames the conflict, the narratives also illustrated resistance to reproducing this ethno-nationalist division. Consequently, as the ideologies, meanings, and understandings of the conflict expand, so might the solutions, interventions, and reconstruction efforts in a beneficial and more inclusive manner.

In a closely related manner, the roles of Darfuri women regarding the conflict were also complicated by my analysis. Their narratives supported, contradicted, and
complicated the subject roles and understandings of Darfuri women typically found in popular news media and within the larger social discourse surrounding the conflict as chronicled by Kothari (2008) and Murphy (2007) among others. Instead of merely victimization and oppression, their narratives demonstrated agency *within* victimization, and resistance *necessitated* by control. For instance, my analysis illustrated that Darfuri women were subjected and confined to the adverse conditions of displacement camps, but some women also resisted these unfavorable conditions by organizing a school for the camp’s children. Furthermore, the interplay of those tensions powerfully shaped moral meanings about the conflict, defied shame and silence, allowed space for emergent meanings and identities, and therefore complicated constraining gender roles and dominant systems of meaning.

Overall, the discursive space held by the voices of Darfuri women enables possibilities to actively affect their material and ideological situations, especially considering the uncertain and chaotic state of the conflict and subsequent re-building processes. In other words, the oppression and control experienced by Darfuri women paradoxically allowed the potential to renegotiate their societal structures and their roles within it. In sum, my analysis of the women’s narratives does not offer an opposing or conflicting view of the conflict and Darfuri women than seen elsewhere, but a view that is more nuanced and complex, a view that accounts more for multifaceted experiences and identities, and for dynamic, emergent, and sometimes hidden meanings.
In what ways do the Darfuri women's narratives both subvert and reproduce gendered positions found in dominant discourses?

My analysis added to past research that has explored the ways in which dominant gendered discourses dynamically shape the identities, experiences, voices, and rhetorical spaces of women. The Darfuri women's co-constructed narratives did reproduce and reflect traditional patriarchal positions, seen in their violent physical experiences of oppression and control, their more subtle experiences of ideological control, and their narrative personas, which centered on victimization and caretaking. These acceptable and legitimized experiences and subject positions rendered their stories intelligible and their access to rhetorical space.

My analysis also illustrated, however, the ways in which the women’s narratives exhibited actions and roles that challenge the typical positioning of women as passive, vulnerable, and controlled. The narratives featured numerous accounts of women’s active decisions, choices, and risks, acting in leadership roles, planning for the future, and resisting the physical and ideological constraints of the conflict’s context. Furthermore, the rhetorical space allowed by their previously mentioned traditional positionalities imbued their voices with powerful visibility, credibility, and the potential to affect the direction of the conflict and thus their material situations. These examples position women in more active, dominant, and political roles, which oftentimes are not seen or examined in patriarchal narratives and understandings. In general, although the narrative roles and identities of the Darfuri women were co-constructed, and thus oftentimes reflected or reproduced those in dominant discourses, the narratives also allowed space for subversive
feminine meanings and voices, challenging traditional patriarchal understandings of women.

In what ways do the Darfuri women’s narratives represent the potential to transform social relationships?

Finally, my analysis of the Darfuri women’s narratives contributed to feminist literature and to considerations of women in general, by illustrating the possibility for subversive meanings and understandings of social relationships. Overall, the women’s narratives illustrated how gendered voices, roles, and experiences can be shaped by, and shape, dominant discourses. My exploration of the victim subject position demonstrated how dominant gendered discourses can shape what stories are intelligible and what roles one must take to tell a story. Thus these dominant discourses and narratives become constitutive of each other (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004). Yet the narratives also revealed the existence of alternate identities, subversive meanings, and new experiences, and therefore the possibility for the subversion of the dominant gender paradigm. In this sense, the emergent and dynamic nature of interaction, discourse, meaning, and voice, represent real possibilities for feminist aims, even in the face of systematic dominance and oppression.

Furthermore, as more women’s voices, standpoints, and experiences are heard, their effects and presence become cyclical, expanding and inviting a wider range of alternate experiences, roles, and identities, challenging the autonomy and constraints of dominant discourses as a result (Enloe, 1989). Therefore, the subversive experiences, roles, identities found within the Darfuri women’s
narratives, as well as the subversive potential of the narratives themselves, point to a wider opportunity to challenge and subvert women’s confinement to passive, vulnerable, private, and subordinate roles.

Within the specific context of the Darfuri conflict itself, the rhetorical space gained by the women’s voices and the potential for more complete, diverse, and subversive meanings may impact solutions and subsequent rebuilding processes in Darfur in an empowering way. As victims, the voices of women are in a privileged and powerful position in which to influence justice and the road back to peace following the conflict. In this position, the women’s voices may have the potential to challenge their traditional societal roles and the private/public dichotomy, perhaps leading to a more active and powerful role in Darfurian society, and more liberatory and sustainable social relationships and roles in general.

Limitations

The main limitations of my project stem from geographic and time constraints. Regrettably, due to geographic constraints, I was not able to conduct my own interviews or travel to Darfur to witness the physical and social environment firsthand for this project. Therefore, my narrative data was gathered through secondary sources, limiting my knowledge of the co-constructed discursive processes surrounding the narratives and the influences of the original interviewer. As I was not the interviewer, I did not have control over the researcher’s attitudes, agendas, or questioning methods, and the ways they might have affected the women’s narratives. Additionally, the original interviews eliciting the narratives have been translated into English, and further edited or sliced into excerpts for
particular audiences or publications. Each of these processes entails certain biases and interpretations that as a secondary audience, I am not totally privy to. In this sense, I am studying representations of the women’s narratives, which somewhat limits my analysis of the intricacies of primary data and discursive context. As a secondary researcher, however, I do have access to how the narratives were framed, the context in which they appear, and any surrounding interpretations the presenter may have made.

Second, due to the constraints of time and the nature of this project, the scope of my analysis is also limited. The complexity of the situation in Darfur is beyond the scope of one project or one researcher, and defies a singular analysis or theoretical base. The conflict in Sudan is characterized by a seemingly endless entanglement of concepts such as gender, race, class, patriarchy, ethnicity, politics, colonialism, militarism, economics, nationalism, religion, and so on. While each contributor or influence or discourse is critical and inseparable from the larger context, the depth and breadth of this project can accommodate only a limited consideration of these influences. While this feminist project focuses mainly on the influences of gender, patriarchy, and nationalism within the Darfuri conflict, further research is needed to explore other issues in depth. Possible directions for such future research are the focus of the proceeding section.

**Directions for Future Research**

Consistent with my general recognition of multiple discourses and the fluidity of meaning, it is essential to acknowledge that there are many meanings, discourses, perspectives, and thus interpretations that could not be addressed in my
project, and therefore should be addressed in future research. While my research and analysis largely utilized a gendered perspective, race and ethnicity also play a significant role in the conflict, in audience co-construction, and in the Darfuri women's identities. Therefore, their experiences of oppression, victimization, agency, control, and resistance are constrained and enabled as much by race as gender. Consequently, future research regarding Darfuri women should focus on the role of race and the unique intersectionality of race and gender in their lives and within the conflict.

Additionally, future research might focus more narrowly on various audiences' interactions with, and uses of, similar narratives. While my analysis focused more narrowly on the narratives themselves, other studies might explore more in depth how various narratives are produced for, used by, and interpreted by different, perhaps multi-cultural, audiences. Finally, future research might continue to explore and examine forthcoming outcomes and reconstruction processes concerning the conflict, along with women's places or roles within this unfolding process. A comparative examination of possible change, transformation, or empowerment, and the communicative processes involved in this would be both academically and practically valuable. Research concerning such communicative and empowering processes might serve as the basis for future community development and reconstructive programs. For example, research focusing on promoting and understanding women’s views, needs, and solutions regarding the conflict may provide important insight for individuals developing decisions and programs centered on intervention, aid, peace negotiations and political changes.
Furthermore, the increased visibility of the Darfuri women’s voices, experiences, and public roles in their communities wrought by the conflict might be carefully cultivated, maintained, and negotiated into the reconstruction of Darfuri communities and societies in a more empowering way.

**Conclusion**

Taken as a whole, my project originated from Harding’s (1987) call for feminist researchers to begin with what appears troubling from the perspectives of women. Therefore I began with Darfur. Indeed, I believe that the Darfuri conflict is not only physically and materially troubling for women, but also troubling in an ideological and discursive sense. Where I began, however, is not exactly where I ended. Along the way, I gained an understanding that from trouble often comes opportunity, possibility, hope, and change. Consequently, I end with a deeper and more complex understanding for trouble, conflict, tension, and contradiction. The Darfuri women’s troubles and their conflict are not resolved here and do not end here. But neither does the possibilities for change. The women’s narratives point to larger dynamic processes, the ongoing evolution of meaning, and the emergent possibilities that characterize the conflict, dominant discourses, gender roles, and social relationships overall. In short they point to the possibility of social change.

As with the entirety of my project, *conflict* also has a conceptual place in my concluding reflexivity as a researcher. My social standpoint and identity might generally be categorized as conflicting with, or existing on the opposite end of the spectrum from those of the Darfuri women that I have written about here. As I have previously discussed, I do not share the Darfuri women’s race, ethnicity, geographic
region, or many of their experiences. While our social identities and experiences are very different, I would not like to conceptualize them as mutually exclusive or dichotomous, but as a complex tension to be managed. The differences in perspectives, situated positionalities, and biases are important, and should be acknowledged, accounted for, and respected, but should not result in separation or restriction. Rather, they present an important opportunity for respectful exploration and careful learning, hopefully resulting in a more complex relationships and interactions.
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