Political Islam, Inclusive Governance and Fragile Settings: A Case Study of Burkina Faso

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Introduction

In January 2022, Burkina Faso was the theater of the latest of a series of coups d'etat that took place in the Sahel in the last years. President Kaboré was removed by the army and accused of not doing enough to respond to the security challenges that the country has been facing since 2015. The army has since then taken control of the country, which is still victim of djihadist attacks especially in the East, where recently the bloodiest attack since last year was carried out in the commune of Madjoari.[1] The main reason behind the coup lies in security concerns. However, the crisis that is unfolding in Burkina Faso finds its roots in local and social dynamics, hence going deeper than just the security dimension. On the one hand, the population has been calling for class equality and has been questioning the supremacy of traditional chiefs and the minority religion. On the other hand, the Burkinabe feel abandoned by the state and perceive state representatives and security forces as "foreigners trying to enrich themselves rather than state agents responsible for providing services" (International Crisis Group, 2017). This is a clear example of how exclusion can foment crises and conflicts, how it can destabilize societies and weaken the State. It is therefore crucial in a context such as the Burkinabe to establish an inclusive society that takes into account all the actors. In particular, in Burkina Faso recently there has been a change in identity that remarks the urgency of creating a broader inclusive society. In the past years, religious identity was of secondary importance for Burkinabe, who firstly identified themselves on the basis of their nationality, and in second stance by their religion (International Crisis Group, 2016). Today, national identity has lost importance, making more room for cultural and religious identities (Interpeace, 2021). Muslims have been voicing their frustrations, grievances and lack of inclusion in official decision making positions, and the opportunities of including political Islam in the governance of the state and local entities have been overlooked. This is why it is deemed necessary to shed light on this topic, which is what this thesis seeks to do. Before proceeding, it is necessary to underline that not all Muslim leaders have a political agenda or an agenda that has Islam at its heart, but in this thesis, when reference is made to "Islamic leaders," it is referred to those Islamic leaders involved in politics and that have a political agenda.

[1] Africa News, Burkina Faso: At least 50 killed in jihadist attack on eastern rural village, 30 May 2022. Available online at: https://www.africanews.com/2022/05/27/burkina-faso-at-least-50-killed-in-jihadist-attack-on-north-east-rural-village//

This study has been carried out through the author's internship experience at the independent think tank European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).[2] ECDPM is a Brussels-based non-partisan think tank that works to promote policies that foster sustainable development. It works with institutional actors, such as the EU and the African Union (AU), and other stakeholders located in both Europe and Africa. ECDPM undertakes research on many different fields, and produces analyses that are interdisciplinary and practical. The researcher has had the opportunity to be involved in projects and research carried out by ECDPM, as she spent three months working in this environment. The topic on which the research has focused during her work at ECDPM is specifically the role that political Islam plays in Burkina Faso, and the challenges and opportunities it presents in the framework of inclusive governance. This has allowed her to carry out extensive desk research on the topic and have access to stakeholders and actors involved in the discourse surrounding political Islam in Burkina Faso. Moreover, the author was granted access to a whole set of sources that are not accessible to those who are not part of ECDPM's work and network, or do not work in close contact with the EU institutions. This allowed her to have a clearer perception and insights of the internal work that is carried out at the EU level on important topics, which however are not accessible to the public.

Before proceeding, a moment of reflection about political Islam is deemed necessary. Indeed, the author has struggled to find up-to-date definitions and considerations about political Islam, and in particular non-Western definitions of it. As stated by many authors quoted in the literature review presented in this study, political Islam cannot be considered spaceless and timeless. Nevertheless, many studies and considerations put forward, especially by Western scholars and used in this review, are based on a conception of political Islam that dates back to the 1990s and early 2000s. As we will see later in this thesis, interlocutors that have been interviewed by the author for this thesis believe that "political Islam" is a Western concept used to make a clear distinction with the secularist nature of Western states, which formally do not accept a mingleling of religion (especially Islam) with state affairs.

The same applies to radicalization and studies surrounding this phenomenon, meaning that the literature review presented here is mainly based on Western perspectives and studies carried out with the purpose of understanding radicalization to prevent it from happening in Europe. Moreover, for the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to stress that in this research political Islam is not equated to terrorism or radicalization by default. The author deemed necessary to

[2] Home page available online at: https://ecdpm.org/

dedicate some space to the phenomenon of radicalization to acknowledge that in Europe (and the West in general), discourses surrounding radicalization have eclissed a broader view on political Islam, which contributed to a rhetoric of viewing political Islam only in terms of violence. The main reason behind this could be found in the excessive emphasis of the European public debate and media platform on the link between (political) Islam and terrorism that appeared after the terrorist attacks on the twin towers on September 11, 2001. Since then, European literature and discourse have been mainly focused on violence and extremism of the Islamic religion, even though episodes of violence and extremist Islamic currents are the exception, rather than the rule. This shows that the EU, for example, as we will see later on, has been acting out of fear, missing opportunities to further exchange with Islamic actors.

1. Political Islam, Inclusive Governance and Fragile Settings

1.1. Literature review

The relationship between religion and politics in Africa has been researched and investigated by Western scholars since the 1980s and 1990s, as the continent experienced significant changes that impacted the practice of Islam in Africa. Processes such as economic and political liberalization, which pushed the continent to abandon the one-party rule in favor of greater freedoms of expressions and associations, the weakening or collapse of the state, increased global linkages, and events such as the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 Iranian revolution have greatly impacted Africa and its Muslim societies (Soares & Otayek, 2007; Saint-Lary, 2019). Today, there are approximately 1.9 billion Muslims worldwide, and while the majority live in the Asia-Pacific region, as of 2019, , while 20 percent of them live in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and 16 percent of them live in sub-Saharan Africa.[3] Islam is not a new religion to the continent, as it has been present for at least a millenium, even though its spreading among different areas and groups of people speeded up only in the mid 19th and 20th century (Soares & Otayek, 2007). Idrissa exemplifies that while the 'civilizing mission' of France and Britain "had principally been about importing norms and values of governance that had solidified as a consequence of the rise of civil society in those countries in the 19th century," the rise of a religious society in West Africa was actually precipitated by French and British colonialism (Idrissa, 2017: 5). Indeed, when colonialism unfolded,[4] more or less one-third of the people were Muslims, while by its end, at least two-thirds were Muslims (*ibidem*).

Existing research shows that religious pluralism has been the norm in sub-Saharan and West Africa, where Muslims, Christians and African traditional religions have interacted and lived side by side with one another (Soares & Otayek, 2007; Idrissa, 2017; Saint-Lary, 2019). The process of Islamization of society continued after the countries obtained independence from their colonizers. However, when the countries became independent, they inherited their colonizers' governance system, which was intended to rule a civil state, not a religious society. The colonizers' system refers to a clear distinction between the religion (which in Europe at the time was identified with the Church) and public or state affairs, and it is referred to as 'secularism.'

[3] Data available on Statista at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1239494/share-of-muslim-population-in-africa-by-country/ [Accessed on 6 May 2022]

[4] The 'starting date' of colonialism conventionally coincides with Louis Faidherbe's appointment as Senegal's French governor in 1854, while the 'ending date' is fixed in 1960, by which year all West African colonies obtained independence (Idrissa, 2017).

However, while secularism in Europe and North America emerged as an organic product from the bottom up, in MENA and sub-Saharan countries Western colonialism and imperialism imposed the political manifestation of secularism, which was then kept alive by local elites who were often alienated from the "religious sentiment of the masses" (Idrissa, 2017: 137). However, despite these negative connotations, today secularism is still more or less the rule in many African countries (Soares & Otayek, 2007; Idrissa, 2017).

Today liberal democracies are decreasing in numbers, while autocracies are globally on the rise (V-Dem Institute, 2022). Part of the reason why this is happening is explained by 'poor democratic governance' performance, as some former democratic countries are turning autocratic following an increase in corruption, and a lack of accountability and transparency of their governments (ECDPM, 2021a). However, 'governance' conveys different meanings according to who employs this term. Indeed, Aubut warns that there is "no single agreed-upon definition" of governance, and the "vagueness of its meaning is one reason why this term has increasingly been utilized" (2004: 8). However, in development studies, 'governance' has played a key role as 'bad governance' has been identified as one of the main factors why economic growth and poverty reduction were not taking place in the developing world (Malik, 2016). In this framework, governance has been identified as a set of institutions or rules, both formal and informal, that form access, participation and influence of political structures and processes (Grindle, 2010; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In particular, governance looks at how things are done, and corresponds to the capacity of a State, independently from the regime in force there, to deliver services and make and enforce rules (Fukuyama, 2013). Recently, the concept of 'inclusive governance' has been brought to the forefront of development studies and policy discussion, as inclusive political settlements are seen as an important factor to avoid the exacerbation of conflicts, to initiate a peaceful political process and to promote a sustained and shared development (Rocha Menocal, 2015; OECD, 2020).

The next sub-chapters will provide a better understanding and overview of the existing literature on the key concepts that this introduction touched upon, such as inclusive governance, political Islam, the argument around secularism in Europe and fragile settings.

1.1.1. Political Islam, Secularism and the EU

When African countries started to gain independence and build their states in the post-colonial period, Muslim leaders emerged as key political figures, a phenomenon that contributed to the conceptualization of 'political Islam'. Political Islam has been greately studied, and therefore it is possible to find many definitions of this concept. For example, Ayubi describes political Islam as "the doctrine and/or movement which contends that Islam possesses a theory of politics and the State" (1992: ix). Denoeux, instead, recognizes political Islam as the "rise of movements and ideologies drawing on Islamic referents - terms, symbol and events taken from the Islamic tradition - in order to articulare a distinctly political agenda" (2002: 61). Dickinson sees political Islam as "any variant of Islam inspiring or serving as a vehicle for political mobilization or activity" (2005: 3). The common thread, however, that can be found in the many definitions available is that political Islam can be defined as "the belief that the Koran and the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet's life) have something important to say about the way society and governance should be ordered" (Fuller, 2002: 49). It has been widely recognized that political Islam has had a novel and modernizing contribution to societies, as it has brought new social groups into the political process (Hashemi, 2009). According to Fuller, political Islam has also helped Muslims to "establish a clear identity," but most importantly, it cannot beconsideres as a "monolithic, single movement" Fuller & Kurpershoek, 2005). Nevertheless, in the Western literature more generally, political Islam has been portrayed as a monolithical doctrine unrelated to its context (Hurd, 2007; Ayoob, 2006; Ayoob, 2004). To exemplify the magnitude of this consideration, Roy talks about "Orientalism" in the West, which he considers as the "the perception of Islam and of Muslim societies as one global, timeless cultural system" (1994: vii).

A key difference that has been pointed out by Western scholars between political Islam and the role that religion plays in European states' affairs, for example, is that the state and religion dimensions in the West are clearly distinguished. Indeed, European countries had lived a gradual separation of Church and state affairs, which consolidated through the Enlightenment century (18th) and peaked with the French revolution, after which the newly-born 'French nation' was no longer subordinated to religious authority (Idrissa, 2017). Afterwards, during the 19th century, the triumph of civil society was ensured by ideologies such as liberalism and socialism, and the transformation of European societies from religious to civil became seen as irreversible. The distinction between Church and state affairs and the institutionalization of their normative

relations is defined as 'secularism'[5] (*laïcité* in French), which formed the basis upon which the civil state, or liberal democracy, adopted in the West was erected. Hence, tolerance, human rights and democracy are considered to be dependent to a clear separation of civil and religious law, a distinction that it is assumed Islam does not embrace (Scott, 2010). Indeed, Western scholars have depicted political Islam as a "refusal to ackowledge the priviledged status of the private sphere and a transgression of secularist categories of public and private" (Hurd, 2007: 348-349). But interestingly enough they did not apply the same logic to political Christianity, for example, which on the contrary is perceived less threatening than political Islam mainly because the West equates the rise of political Islam to the establishment of *shari'a* and a theocratic state that is incompatible with their democratic values (Asad, 2005; Hurd, 2007; Euben, 2002). For this reason, Western political scientists have tried to demonstrate the existence of an incompatibility between democracy and political Islam, to an extent that political Islam is seen as a threat to democracy and modernity, encouraging an inclination to automatically link fanaticism, extremism and terrorism to Islam (Asad, 2005; Hashemi, 2009; Scott, 2010; Idrissa, 2017).

However, studies have tried to counter-argument the belief that Islam and democracy can not coexist. Asad, for example, has questioned the assumption that only secularist systems are tolerant and democratic, pointing out that "there are intolerant secular societies and tolerant religious ones" (2005: 3). The literature has started to recognize that there is a form of liberal Islam that is represented by different views and that presents liberal principles (Moussalli, 2001; Scott, 2010). The emergence of an "Islamic public sphere" and an "Islamic civil society" has contributed to the formation of a liberal democratic political culture and to a "democratization" of the religion itself that allowed for individual voices to challenge rooted authorities (Dowd, 2015; Villalón & Idrissa, 2020). Indeed, the African continent, after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, was invested by a wave of democratization that forced African regimes to grant some form of liberalization (political, economical, social). The immediate consequence of this newly-found liberalization was a proliferation of associational life, which was particularly felt in the religious sphere (Villalón & Idrissa, 2020). A variety of social groups organized, mobilized and politicized, and those most representative of the majority of the population were ethnic and religious groups, which increased their presence not only in public debates, but also in protests and public pressuring for (or against) a policy issue (Idrissa, 2017; Villalón, 2020). In this framework, new forms of Muslim women's politics for example emerged, as previously

[5] Secularism is defined by The Britannica Dictionary as "the belief that religion should not play a role in government, education, or other public parts of society." Available online at: https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/secularism [Accessed on 7 May 2022]

marginalized groups, such as youth or women, were now able to voice their concerns and participate in political debates from which they had been excluded (Adama, 2007; Villalón, 2020). However, Bayat also argues that discussions around whether the religion of Islam is democratic or not do not fulfil a specific use, as the more appropriate question should be "under what conditions Muslims can *make* them compatible" (2007: 4).

At the beginning of the 2000s, Europe (which here refers to both European nations and the European Union/EU) was perceived to be a central site for the encounter between Islam and Western cultural values of democracy (Özyürek, 2005; Gole, 2006). Islam was carried into public debates by both claims that the new Muslim generations were making and the beginning of formal negotiations for the entry of Turkey into the EU in 2005 (Gole, 2006). Especially this latter event, the candidacy of Turkey to join the EU, sparked a heated debate on the culture and spirituality of Europe and its identity (Özyürek, 2005; Gole, 2006). Those who argued that European culture and civilization rested on Christianity - usually the Right - claimed that Islam was external and even contradictory to the EU culture, and therefore Turkey should have been excluded by default for the simple fact that its major religion was Islam, meaning non-European (Özyürek, 2005). Lefties also ended up criticizing Islam practices because they believed these practices are manifestations of an extreme submission to Islam, which does not leave room for secularist values and religious freedom. Therefore, Özyürek underlines that "despite their differing rationales, both the Left and the Right adopt an exclusionary stance toward Muslims in the new Europe whether those Muslims are secular or religious" (*ibidem*: 510). Asad underlines that despite its tolerance and secularist policies, Europe usually ended up discriminating religious minorities (2003). According to him, Muslims have been allowed to reside and thrive in Europe, but Islam has not been recognized as an indigenous religion (*ibidem*). In this regard, Özyürek stresses that "both Left and Right ignore a crucial fact: Islam is integral to European culture, politics, and history. Only through recognition of this connectivity can one understand and improve the current relations of power among Muslims, Jews, and Christians in Europe and in the post- colonies" (2005: 511). According to her, in order to fight Islamophobia in Europe, rather than focusing only on integration of Muslims, (hegemonic) Christian and secular groups should openly recognize "the already integral nature of Islam" (*ibidem*).

More recently, Wolff recognized that secularism in Europe is still a heated debate, as it is a dynamic concept highly politicized in the EU Parliament (Wolff, 2022). According to her, some associate secularism with (religious) freedom and liberalism, and the EU takes for granted that

EU secular values are universal and necessary, to an extent that secularism is a central narrative used by the EU to position itself *vis-à-vis* others entities in the international system (*ibidem*). Hence, the EU does engage with religious organizations in its external actions, but this is positioned inside a broader discourse around the restoration of religion's presence in International Relations, which is based on the assumption that "once religious moderates are understood, engaged and empowered, and religious fundamentalists identified, sidelined or reformed, the problems posed by religion will lessen and religious freedom will spread across the globe" (Hurd, 2012: 944). Moreover, Wolff stresses that secularism also gives a sense of European collective identity even though it means very different things for every Member State, which creates a paradox: EU external action fixes an identity that is not very clear internally (*ibidem*). Finally, Wolff highlights that the recently found interest for understanding Islam comes from the Paris attacks that took place in November 2015, but it is framed in security terms and only stresses a disconnection between Muslim communities in Europe and the EU's institutions, as for example there is a clear lack of diversity in representatives of different communities in the EU parliament (*ibidem*). However at this point, it is necessary to draw a distinction between political Islam, radicalism and extremism, as these terms are not interchangeble. The next sub-chapter is dedicated to clarify this distinction.

1.1.1.1. Political Islam and Radicalism

Between the 1990s and the 2000s, the literature identified political Islam as the new threat to the West. Indeed, Esposito recognized that with the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world, where the Soviet Union represented the most immediate ideological and military threat to the West, there was a "threat vacuum", which was filled with the identification of political Islam as this new threat (1994). The use of alarmist and superficial tones to describe political Islam fueled a rhetoric that directly linked Islam to fundamentalism and extremism, and that was directed towards identifying "good" and "bad" Muslims (Soares & Otayek, 2007). This trend amplified after the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) perpetrated by Al Qaeda on the United States' (US) soil. What happened was that studies about the instrumentalization of Islam as a source of political mobilization doubled, and focused on radicalization and the spread of transnational terrorism, with virtually no significant contribution to the analysis of political Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (Dickinson, 2005). A genealogical analysis of the association of terrorism with Islam, from which the term 'Islamic terrorism' was coined, highlights that Islam has been largely portayed in the public and political discourse with loosely defined and flexible terms,

which are culturally loaded and presented as fundamentally opposed to the Western ideologies (Jackson, 2007). Muslim communities were quickly labeled as fundamentalists and dangerous, a tendency that has been furthered reinforced by attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) (Fuller & Kurpershoek, 2005).

1.1.2. Inclusive Governance

Studies have shown that peace, stability and development can be fostered and ensured through an inclusive society. Indeed, exclusion is considered as one of the main factors that can foment conflicts, destabilize societies and weaken the State, this is why inclusive political settlements are seen as an important factor to avoid the exacerbation of conflicts, to initiate a peaceful political process and to promote a sustained and shared development (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Rocha Menocal, 2015; Justino, 2017). The 'inclusivity' of core actors and stakeholders in processes of formal conflict resolution such as dialogue and fair elections, with the respect for human rights, is considered a prerequisite for the positive resolution of a conflict (ECDPM, 2021). Therefore, the establishment of inclusive society is seen as crucial, especially in contexts where the State is already weakened, such as in fragile States.[6] In development studies, the establishment of inclusive societies is considered to be the main factor to ensure stability and development, as everything else that development projects - such as democratization, reducing poverty, preventing conflict - want to achieve depends on it (Kaplan, 2015).

An inclusive society corresponds to a society where differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography are set aside, where inclusion and equality of opportunities are ensured (EGM, 2008), and where the respect for all human rights, fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity constitute the basis upon which such society is erected (World Summit for Social Development, 1995). The relevance of 'inclusivity' in the international development policy arenas has been brought to the forefront by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16, which is based on the assumption that inclusive societies are considered to be more prosperous, effective and resilient in the long run (ECDPM, 2021). SDG 16 calls for countries to "[p]romote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."[7] Hence, it adopts 'inclusion' as a normative benchmark. Stemming from SDG 16 and the legacy of 'good

[6] More on fragile States and setting in the next sub-chapter.
[7] Available online at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16 [Accessed on 21 May 2022]

governance' and 'democratic governance', the concept of 'inclusive governance' has been gaining momentum, which is a rather new concept that "does not respond to a clearly defined field of theory or policy in international development" (*ibidem*: 3). However, since it has been more and more adopted by international donors and policymakers, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Governance, which brings together academics, scholars, practitioners and experts of governance to promote it in developing countries, has facilitated a two-year process of consultation on the concept and its practical implications. As a consequence, there has been an agreement of what inclusive governance refers to: (a) Process-based inclusion: it means how decisions are taken, who is included, how and why, whose voices count, how this influences the quality of decision and how decisions are implemented: (b) Outcome-based inclusion: it means who benefits from the distribution of prosperity, how and why and to what effect (OECD, 2020). Inclusive governance, nevertheless, is not just a thematic area or a normative benchmark, but it is also a lens through which to see the world, which therefore applies also in other domains (Keita & Bossuyt, 2022). This is clear in some SDGs, which represent a "powerful framework for transformation that is grounded in a shared understanding of inclusive institutions as both intrinsically valuable and indispensable for tackling poverty, inequality and exclusion and for achieving peace and development" (OECD, 2020), as inclusive governance is necessary to tackle for instance marginalization (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), employment (SDG 8) and inequality (SDG 10).

Inclusive governance is a concept that is becoming even more relevant given the times we live in. As ECDPM points out, "the growing polarization of today's world, exacerbated by democratic regression, autocracy, populism and closing of civic [and] media space, is likely to lead to more exclusion and more conflict" (2021). The latest report by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute[8] shows that "the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen in 2021 is down to 1989 levels. The last 30 years of democratic advances are now eradicated," while dictatorships are on the rise and interest 70% of the world population, meaning 5.4 billion people (V-Dem Institute, 2022). The report underlines that the main causes of the rise of autocracies can be due to misinformation and polarization. In 2021 there was an "epidemic of coup d'états" that continued in the first months of 2022.[9] This wave of coups d'état, which has particularly hit Sahelian states, is a symptom of poor and authoritarian governance that breeds

[8] V-Dem Institute is a research institute that collects data, manages and coordinates several research programs, and collaborates with policy and practitioners' organizations. It is based at the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

[9] There was 5 military and 1 self-coup in 2021, which is a record for the 21st century as the average has been 1.2 coups per year (V-Dem Institute, 2022).

fragility and undermines democratic-state building (Sheehy *et al.*, 2022). Villalón underlines that "the challenges of governance in the Sahel are among the most difficult in the world, [...] as they include economic constraints, demographic pressures, social cleavages and identity-based grievances, geographic limitations and environmental pressure, and more recently, the rise of religiously inspired insurgencies and violence" (2020: 20). Keita and Bossuyt stress that these new trends should be taken into account by international donors (2022), especially using inclusive governance "to promote locally driven reform agendas, elaborated by a plurality of formal and informal actors, that are more focused on problem solving" (ECDPM, 2021).

In fragile contexts, such as the Sahel, establishing inclusive societies is crucial. In particular, the inclusion of customary and religious groups in local governance systems is a key factor to maintaining peace, stability and social cohesion (Bisson, 2020). An overview of fragile settings and contexts, and the relevance of including (political) Islam actors in governance processes, is presented in the next sub-chapter.

1.1.3. Fragile Settings

In the recent literature, there is a growing attention to 'exclusion' as a driver of state instability and conflict (Khan and McAslan, 2015; ECDPM, 2021; Keita and Bossuyt, 2022). When groups of people are excluded, socially, economically and/or politically, coups d'etat and protests could happen, weakening the state structures. This is why the concept of inclusive governance becomes central to strengthen the state and avoid fragility. There is not a unique definition for 'fragility', but the international community has recognized the toll that fragility has on development and peacebuilding, and many organizations have provided their view on this concept.[10] The African Development Bank, for example, defines fragile states as "countries or situations with unique development challenges that have resulted from fragility and conflict including weak institutional capacities and poor governance, economic and geographic isolation, economic disruption, social disruption and insecurity" (ILO FSDR-DEVINVEST, 2016). The EU instead defines fragility as "[referring] to weak or failing structures and to situations where the social contract is broken due to the state's incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions, meets its obligations and responsibilities regarding service delivery, management of resources, rule of law, equitable access to power, security" (*ibidem*). The OECD, on the other hand, rather than providing a strict and

[10] For a complete overview of the definitions provided by many different international actors, see ILO FSDR-DEVINVEST, 2016.

unique definition of fragility, points out drivers and dimensions of fragility, such as violence, justice, institutions, economic foundations, which depend on the country's context and vulnerability (*ibidem*). The common ground between these different definitions is found by Stewart and Brown who define fragility as "applying to a country which is failing or at high risk of failing" and who differentiate between three dimensions of state fragility and failure, namely "authority failures; service entitlements failures; and legitimacy failures" (2009).

In contexts of fragility, inclusive governance is considered as a tool for conflict prevention and peace building. On the one hand, inclusive governance is seen as connected to the notion of 'positive peace', which refers to the absence of violence and the identification and tacklement of underlying structural drivers of conflict. On the other hand, inclusive governance is crucial to limit fragility because "if systems of governance are inclusive then grievances can be managed" (ECDPM, 2021). Grievances can stem from "marginalization, inequitable distribution to resources, exclusion or lack of representation from national politics and/or economics" (*ibidem*), but also from "weak or declining economic performance, demographic stress, low levels of human development, environmental stress, and 'bad neighborhood'" (European University Institute, 2009). In fragile contexts, such as in the Sahel and Burkina Faso, which is the case study for this research, maintaining peace, stability and social cohesion can be facilitated by inclusive governance, in particular by the inclusion of customary and religious groups (Bisson, 2020), as they ensure "more presence on the ground and often enjoy more legitimacy than the formal state" (ECDPM, 2020). However, international donors have yet to come to recognize the importance of including such actors in governance processes, but Keita and Bossuyt stress the importance of this (2022). Indeed, if international donors, such as the EU, want to support inclusive governance, they will have to be open to what is called 'dirty deals,' which refer to deals with their 'non preferred' actors that they tend to ignore, such as indeed religious actors (*ibidem*).

1.2. Research Question and Methodology

In recent years, political Islam has emerged as an alternative to secular states, but despite the many studies available on political Islam, the role that it could play in the framework of inclusive governance, that many international agencies are recognizing as crucial to foster peace, stability and development in fragile contexts, has not gained importance in academic studies and policy circles. This holds also true for the case study of this thesis, namely Burkina Faso. Here, around 60 per cent of the population is Muslim (Saint-Lary, 2015), but as a consequence of colonial

heritage, they are still excluded and marginalized from governance processes, even though the importance of including religious and customary actors to develop and build an inclusive society has been established. In Burkina Faso, Muslim leaders active in politics have been voicing their frustration, which arises from the marginalization that their community faces for what concerns both a process-based and outcome-based inclusion. Given the importance that an inclusive society plays for peace, stability and development of a country such as Burkina Faso, research should focus on the challenges and opportunities that involving political Islam in inclusive governance processes in this specific context could pose. Therefore, the research question that will guide this thesis is: What challenges and opportunities does political Islam present in the framework of inclusive governance in Burkina Faso? As a conclusion, a sub-question that is worth answering is: What can the case of Burkina Faso teach us?

Therefore, this research seeks to fill the existing gap surrounding the study of political Islam in Burkina Faso, to add to the existing knowledge and understanding of political Islam in this country, and to investigate and explore the challenges and opportunities that political Islam could present in the framework of inclusive governance in this particular context. This would not only add to the existing knowledge, but could also be used to inform international development policies that foster the establishment of a more inclusive society in Burkina Faso. A better overview of the context of Burkina Faso will be provided in the next chapters, where the processes of radicalization that have interested the Sahelian countries, and Burkina Faso in particular, in recent years, and the role that EU has played in the country will also be illustrated.

1.2.1. Methodology

In order to answer the research question, a sample of interviewees has been selected. This sample included experts of political Islam, inclusive governance and Burkina Faso, and has been reached out through networks and connections of the researcher, but also by exploiting ECDPM's own networks and connections. Given the current global pandemic of COVID-19 that was still unfolding at the time the research was carried out (January-May 2022), and the impossibility for the researcher to go to the field to apply other means of research and carry out the interviews in person, these interviews were arranged online. The interviews were semi-structured, to allow the researcher to conduct the interviewee to answer her question, but also leave space for connections that could arise from the natural flow of the conversation. The sample of people interviewed has been informed about the scope of the research, and has been

asked for consent to participate in a one-to-one interview and to be recorded. Indeed, recording the interviews has allowed the researcher to access them later to note down details that might not have been noted while the interview was being conducted. Nonetheless, informal interviews have also been carried out, as the researcher had the possibility to informally talk with experts and EU representatives, and participate in EU meetings. These informal interviews have not been recorded, but are deemed crucial to inform the back of this thesis and have therefore been included in its data.

Data so collected have been stored in the researcher's computer inside a password-protected folder. These data have then been analyzed using a content analysis, as this method allowed the researcher to sort out the main arguments and topics raised, codifying and then interpreting them. However, alongside interviews used to gather primary sources data, also secondary sources data have been included in the research. In particular, the researcher has had access to secondary sources that had been collected by ECDPM and other stakeholders with which ECDPM works. Finally, the researcher has carried out an extensive desk research that has allowed her to gather secondary data that will feed this thesis.

Given how little is known about the role of political Islam in the framework of inclusive governance in Burkina Faso, a case study approach has been adopted. Indeed, the "case study" research design allows the researcher to "explore an area where little is known or where [the researcher] want[s] to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community" (Kumar, 2019: 292). Therefore, this approach has helped the researcher to explore and understand extensively the topic, rather than just confirming or quantifying.

1.2.2. Ethics and Limitations

Given that the research has included interviews with actors, experts and stakeholders, their consent has been asked for both being interviewed, and also being recorded. Their verbal consent has been sought after that the researcher had explained to them the scope and aim of her research. An informed verbal consent to the interview and recording is deemed sufficient for the scope of this thesis. Moreover, the interviewees' anonymity has been ensured, in order to allow them to speak freely and without fear of repercussions. Therefore, their names have been omitted, and replaced with the following coded structure: Formal/informal interview, position, date.

For what concerns limitations to the carrying out of this thesis, the main one has been presented by the sample of interviewees. The researcher has reached out to experts of political Islam based in Burkina Faso through her network. However, these experts were based in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina, and given that the researcher could not go on the field to carry out the interviews in person, other important actors and stakeholders that live outside of the capital have not been reached by this study. Hence, the knowledge and information that the researcher acquired about the local level governance are based on these experts' perspectives.

2. Challenges and Opportunities of Including Political Islam in Inclusive (Local) Governance - The Case of Burkina Faso

2.1. The (Governance) Context of Burkina Faso

Source: OCHA Burkina Faso Situation Report 1 Feb 2021.

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. Before COVID, despite high annual GDP growth rates, more than 40% of its population lived below the poverty line and its Human Development Index (HDI)[11] in 2019 was 0.452, putting the country in the low human development category, as it was ranked 182 out of 189 countries and territories (UNDP, 2020). Since 2016, the country has been living in a state of crisis, mainly linked to a state of insecurity fueled by the emergence of terrorist and jihadist groups. Adding to this, there has been an increase in unemployment, poverty, inequality, and a rise in tensions between religious groups and communities. A third of the country's territory is no longer controlled by the state, and the social pact between the citizens and the state seems to be eroded. The degeneration of the

[11] More on how the HDI is constructed and developed at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi [Accessed on 24 May 2022]

situation in the country has been linked, among others, to bad governance, exclusion and lack of equality (ECDPM, 2022). In particular, some structural factors have been recognized as having a strong impact on the country, such as the governance heritage of the colonial period (*ibidem*). The French ruler implemented a centralized governance structure, which was maintained by independent Burkina Faso's[12] first president, Maurice Yaméogo, who quickly adopted an autocratic approach, imposing a single party regime and limiting public freedom (Loada, 2020). After decades of coups d'etat and 'special regimes,' in the 1990s Burkina Faso started a new democratic transition (Villalón, 2020). In June 1991 a new constitution was adopted and Blaise Compaoré was elected president. Compaoré implemented a "sham democracy" (Loada, 2020: 105) or "démocratie de façade" (ECDPM, 2022), in the sense that on the one hand, he allowed a free press, the establishment and spread of parties and civil society organizations, therefore providing for elements of liberal democracy. On the other hand, informal agreements and manipulation were used to strictly control the regime, effectively creating a hybrid governance (Loada, 2020). Indeed, Compaoré semi-autocracy was based on a neopatrimonial system, where 'neopatrimonialism' refers to those societies in which power and decision-making reside outside formal institutions, as "decisions about resources are made by 'big men' and their cronies, who are linked by 'informal' (private and personal, patronage and clientelist) networks that exist outside (before, beyond and despite) the state structure, and who follow a logic of personal and particularist interest rather than national betterment" (Cammack, 2007). In particular, neopatrimonialism combines modern state bureaucracy and patrimonialism,[13] and concerns those societies that have been included in the international system (Budd, 2004).

In 2014, a popular insurgency erupted after President Compaoré tried to change the constitution to add another term to its presidency, and soon turned into a revolution that ousted the president and ended its 27 years of power (Hagberg, 2016). A year of democratic transition followed, but in 2015 a military coup ended this process (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, the coup was condemned by virtually every Burkinabe, as they believed that the army had crossed a point of no return, and engaged in a violent resistance that ended the coup a few days later (Hagberg, 2015). After the failure of the coup, the transition regime was re-installed, elections were held and Roch March Christian Kaboré became president (Hagberg, 2016). The ousting of president

[12] The country was called "Burkina Faso" in 1984 under president Sankara. Before, it was called Upper Volta or *Haute-Volta* in French.

[13] Patrimonialism is to some extent similar to personal rule, as it is a "form of political order where power is concentrated in the personal authority of one individual ruler. [...] He or she may be bound by traditions or customs, but there are no legal-rational constraints on government. The leader is above the law, [and] the state is their private property," making the act of ruling arbitrary (Thomson, 2010: 117).

Compaoré brought high hopes for a real democratization process, together with the reduction of inequality and the fight against corruption and impunity which characterized Compaoré's regime (ECDPM, 2022). And indeed, after the 2016 real free municipal elections, the political and civil spaces could enjoy more freedom and the civil society and media flourished. Burkina Faso presented an impressive formal architecture of institutions, agencies and rules, characteristics of a modern state that gave the appearance of a functional system (*ibidem*). However, behind a legalistic façade, many informal rules and dynamics still continue to dominate the political and economic game and constitute significant blockages to reforms. Even though spaces for citizen participation have been created, the consultations are ritualistic in nature, and they have no real influence on decision-making. The neo-patrimonial system consolidated by Compaoré is still in place at all state levels and public administration (even in deconcentrated services) as the elites are convinced that they are the only ones able to make decisions (*ibidem*). This system only perpetuated a non-inclusive form of governance at both decision-making level and sharing of development benefits, which was fueled by a culture of individual or clan enrichment and 'savage capitalism' (*ibidem*).

2.1.1. Fragility of the State

Burkina Faso presents those characteristics that define a state as 'fragile', namely weak structures; authority failures in some parts of the country, as the government does not control part of its territories; service entitlements failures, as the state has been struggling to guarantee access to some basic services; and legitimacy failures, as the social pact between the citizens and the state is in jeopardy, and local traditional authorities are considered more legitimate than state representatives (Maglo and Grathwohl, 2020; ECDPM, 2022). Burkina has been struggling with instability and insecurity since 2015, for both endogenous and exogenous factors. The state's vulnerability is linked to structural components and grievances that have been brought to light with the overthrowing of Compaoré's regime. Marginalization, exclusion and inequality are among the main endogenous factors that add to the state's fragility, together with poverty, high cost of living, lack of economic opportunities and a mounting demographic pressure (3% in 2020)[14] (Maglo and Grathwohl, 2020). The youth, which constitutes a large majority of the population,[15] is more and more frustrated by unmet social demands and lack of inclusive national

[14] According to the World Bank. Available online at:https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW?locations=BF [Accessed on 26 May 2022]
[15] About 65% of the population is under 25 years with the median age of 17 years. Source: Save the Children, Effect of Youth in Action on Work Readiness and Socioeconomic Outcomes: Findings from Burkina Faso, 2018. Available online at:

and sectoral policies that would open labor market opportunities. They are faced by underemployment, unemployment, and the recruitment by extremist groups who capitalize on grievances and lack of opportunities (International Crisis Group, 2017; ECDPM, 2022). Unequal distribution of state resources outside the capital, widening income inequality, and lack of alternatives fuel a broad dissatisfaction of the population with the government which then translates in loss of state's legitimacy and fragility (Maglo and Grathwohl, 2020), as the local population feels abandoned by the government, whose institutions outside the capital have a scarce presence, are overstretched and unable to deliver basic services such as water, electricity, health care and security (International Crisis Group, 2017; IPSS, 2020). The main exogenous factors, instead, that have affected Burkina Faso come from spillover effects from the Malian crisis and the broader regional instability.[16] Since 2015, Burkina has been theatre of terrorist attacks, together with attacks perpetrated by self-defense gorups and other armed groups, and in 2019, the country suffered more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country (International Crisis Group, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020). However, the multifaceted crisis in the rural areas of Burkina Faso has only contributed to the armed conflict that from Mali spread to Burkina, highlighting that "the jihadist threat is more the consequence of the country's problems than the cause" (International Crisis Group, 2020).

The latest coup d'etat that unfolded in Burkina Faso in January 2022 only highlights the state's fragility and its incapacity to deal with underlying problems. On 24 January 2022, the army (the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration – MPSR) headed by Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, removed president Kaboré, suspended the constitution and dissolved the government and parliament, denouncing the inability of the president to unite the state and to effectively respond to the security challenges that the country is facing as the reasons behind the coup (Akinwotu, 2022). Millions of Burkinabè have been affected by the violence of jihadist groups, community militias and sometimes regular soldiers (International Crisis Group, 2022). The security situation for many civilians and soldiers reached a tipping point on November 14, 2021, when 53 gendarmes were killed in an attack in Inata, in northern Burkina Faso, the most lethal attack against soldiers in the country's history. What shocked the population was also that the local media revealed that the gendarmes killed were weakened by lack of food and were nearly starving, while their appeals for help to their superiors went unheard (*ibidem*). Contrary to previous coups d'etat that happened in Burkina, the population took to the streets to support the

https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/yia_burkina_faso_pos_endline_report_february_2018.pdf/ [Accessed on 26 May 2022]

[16] More on the Malian crisis, regional instability and jihadist threat in Chapter 2.

military,[17] but their support should not be seen as a rejection of democracy, rather as a "desire for stability and good governance, [as] young people and social movements in Burkina Faso want rule of law, regular elections, political freedoms, safe neighborhoods, and economic prosperity" (Obadare, 2022).

2.2. Political Islam in Burkina Faso

In 2017, an assessment of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on religions in Burkina Faso estimated that in the Burkinabe population 63.2% are Muslims, 24.6% are Roman Catholic, 6.9% are Protestant, and 4.2% are traditional/animist.[18] These different religions have been living peacefully together in Burkina for several years, making the country a role model for religious tolerance and classifying it as an exception in the sub-Saharan Sahel countries (Langewiesche, 2011; Audet Gosselin, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2016). However, Burkina Faso has been characterized by what Idrissa calls a paradox: despite Muslims forming a clear majority, their influence and power is still limited, while the Roman Chatolic Church exercises a dominant influence in national politics and Catholics populate high levels of state and management of both private and public organizations (2017). Indeed, in the political elite there are more Christians than Muslims, but a national interreligious dialogue has been of key importance to foster a peaceful coexistence between the many religions,[19] even if recently its honesty has been questioned, and Muslims have been voicing their frustration at their low representation within the political elite and the civil service (ECDPM, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2016).

2.2.1. Education

The Catholic Church, through its vast network of schools established since the colonial period, has secured a virtual monopoly of the ruling elite of the post-colonial Burkinabè state (Otayek, 1997; Somé, 2001; Bouron, 2011). The White Fathers, Christian missionaries who arrived in Burkina during the colonial period, were the ones to lay down the foundations of the Church's

[17] France24, Hundreds gather in Burkina Faso's capital to support military coup, 26 January 2022. Available online at: https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220126-hundreds-gather-in-burkina-faso-s-capital-to-support-military-coup [Accessed on 26 may 2022]
[18] CIA, The World Factbook, 2017/2018. Available online at: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/burkina-faso/#:~:text=Muslim%2063.2%25%2C%20Roman%20Catholic%2024.6,(2017%2D18%20est.) [Accessed on 26 May 2022]
[19] Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022.

strengths in Burkina Faso, and gained some degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the colonial state, because they were training staff and authorities that were then employed in the public sector or the economy, and building infrastructures and institutions (such as schools, hospitals, orphanages) without any cost for the colonial state (Idrissa, 2017). By the 1950s, Burkinabe Catholicism took the form of what still holds true today: it is formed by a minority mainly scattered in the western regions and Ouagadougou with a strong control over a state that proclaims itself as secular (*ibidem*). However, around those same years, Coranic madrassas, or Islamic schools, started to emerge, following the establishment of the Muslim Cultural Union (UCM), which was created in 1953 with the task of popularizing these madrassas (Compaore *et al.*, 2022). Islamic schools have experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, but while the public francophone school system applies 95% of the official curriculum of the Ministry of Education, private Arabic and Franco-Arabic madrassas, on the other hand, aimed exclusively at the Muslim school population, have so far integrated only a small fraction of the official national educational program. (ECDPM, 2020). The main difference between Arabic and Franco-Arabic madrassas is that in the Arabic madrassas, the subjects of the 'official' curriculum, such as history, geography, mathematics, are taught in Arabic or in French, while in Franco-Arabic madrassas, these subjects are usually taught in French. Muslims who have followed a French-speaking, secular or Christian school curriculum and who have entered the civil service or the official economic sector, call themselves "Muslim intellectuals" (Madore, 2020). These francophone Muslim intellectuals are increasingly reaching out to the political sphere to make their demands heard, suggesting a stronger Muslim presence in the future political arena and a changing in the status quo (ECDPM, 2020; EU DEVCO, 2020). In the current Muslim public and political debate there are some reccurrent themes, including the concept of state secularism, empowerment of the Muslim community, pre-emption of any possible 'legalization' or 'decriminalization' of homosexuality, Advocacy against restrictions on the wearing of the Islamic veil, safeguarding the right to polygamy, inclusion of the Islamic religious calendar in the demarcation of national public holidays, State support (financial and logistical) for the Hajj pilgimage (ECDPM, 2020).

2.2.2. Main (political) Islamic Actors in Burkina Faso

In present Burkina Faso there are three major Islamic currents that have a political role, namely: traditionalists (Sufi and traditional 'maghrebi' Malékites); francophone 'reformists' (Salafi inspired); Wahhabis (doctrinal Salafis). The traditional side is represented by the *Communauté*

Musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBF, Malékite), and the *Association Islamique de la Tidjaniyya du Burkina* (AITB, Sufi). Historically, this current has been in competition with the other two around legitimacy and authority, but it remains one of the most influential. The francophone Salafist 'reformists' include Islamic militant movements such as the *Association des élèves et étudiants musulmans du Burkina* (AEEMB) and *Cercle d'études, de recherches et de formation islamiques* (CERFI). AEEMB and CERFI are pragmatic and modernist in their actions, but Salafist by nature. In general, they do not subscribe to the traditional 'popular' Burkinabé Islam nor to Sufi (Tidjaniyya) Islam. But, despite the fact that their referential framework is largely salafisized, they do not endorse the Wahhabi's strict dogmatism either. AEEMB and CERFI constitute nowadays the main supporters of French-speaking Muslim intellectuals, and over the last two decades, they have acquired quite some notoriety. The Burkinabé public opinion (both Muslim and Christian) generally appreciates the imams, actions, and organizational transparency of the AEEMB and CERFI. However, in terms of real membership and quantitative representativeness of the Muslim population, AEEMB and CERFI are only a small group. They are mainly an elite movement. In contrast to their high visibility, their recruitment base is rather small and limited to educated Muslims and civil servants (ECDPM, 2020).

Wahhabis instead call for a return to 'true' Islam and personal salvation through piety, as they believe the Islamic values have been lost. Their rhetoric criticizes the 'other', and labels those who do not follow the Islamic prescriptions as they perceive them as corrupted by the West or infidel. In Burkina Faso, it was in the Bobo-Dioulasso region – on the trading routes to Sikasso (Mali) - that the Wahhabi movement was first established, by regional traders imbued with Wahhabi ideas and by fresh pilgrims from Mecca. In 1973, the Wahhabis were authorized to create their own association, which they called the *Mouvement Sunnite* to explicitly claim the superiority of their doctrine over the other Muslim currents in Burkina Faso. Today, the *Mouvement Sunnite* has its headquarters in Ouagadougou but has many regional and local branches around Burkina Faso. In recent years, Wahhabis have been gaining ground among the population by coupling the construction of new mosques with the provision and distribution of drinking water. Together with this, their functioning educational system, their ability to maintain solidarity networks and their extensive media and preaching campaign have also been crucial factors that allowed the *Mouvement Sunnite* to become an influential actor in the Muslim community (ECDPM, 2020). Nevertheless, the salafists have not succeeded in translating their demographic and economic weight in the Muslim community into real socio-political influence (EU DEVCO, 2020).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Muslim leaders moved around quite often and used all sorts of support and new technical avenues to spread their 'reformist' or 'reactionist' ideas. In November 2000, during the 9th Islamic Summit Conference in Doha (Qatar) of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Burkinabé delegation realized it was lacking a proper representative organization *vis-à-vis* other African Muslim countries. As a consequence, in 2005 the *Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina* (FAIB) was created, a federation that connects the nation-level Islamic associations to the State that has the ambition to generate a new impetus to the visibility and participation of Muslim leaders in civil society and the political sphere. In the FAIB the three main Islamic currents are represented, even though AEEMB and CERFI representatives are actually the most listened to by the Burkinabé government. The reason lies in the fact that they have completed a secular, francophone and public education, while other delegates at FAIB have been educated at private Arabic or Franco-Arabic schools (ECDPM, 2020; EU DEVCO, 2020). Moreover, a common feature of the segmented landscape of Burkinabé Muslim associations and organizations is the external dependence. Since the early 1970s associations, mosques and educational structures have benefited from funding from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya in particular. Overall, from the 1970s onwards, Burkinabé Islam is witnessing an increasing influence from Saudi Arabia and its soft power ideological foreign policy, thanks to scholarship students who develop their personal networks of scholars and sponsors (ECDPM, 2020). The EU Trust Fund for Africa has been used to fund many projects on primary and secondary education, including the Franco-Arab schools and the so-called 'foyers coraniques' in Burkina Faso. For what concerns Franco-Arab Schools, the aim of the EU project was to strengthen the provision of education and youth employment. Here, the FAIB has been recognized as an essential partner in the implementation of actions for the development of Franco-Arabic education in Burkina Faso, and it has been identified as an increasingly important vector for religious actors' political influence, with the potential to become a major political player (EU DEVCO, 2020).

2.2.3. Secularism and the State

When Burkina Faso gained independence and adopted the French governance model, a form of "default secularism gradually emerged as the main source of political norms in the country" (Idrissa, 2017: 47). Idrissa, citing Jean-Marie Bouron, describes Burkinabè secularism as consensual, which "rests on a balance between Islam, Catholicism and traditional religions"

(*ibidem*: 48). Muslim intellectuals have been talking about secularism and its implications in Burkina Faso, arguing that the concept of State secularism is foreign to Burkina Faso, that it is an imported idea, imposed by decades of Christian hegemony in political and social life after independence (ECDPM, 2020). The subject is being raised mainly by Muslim organizations who are not satisfied with State management of *laïcité*, as they believe that secularism has been misused by the State as a pretext to favor the dominant Christian minority. However, Muslim leaders do not reject the principle of State secularism as a normative consensual model, they question the notion of State secularism because they believe that its actual application is discriminatory and unfair to the Muslim majority population. They argue that the Burkinabè Muslim population is not being equally treated, because it is *de facto* sytematically underrepresented in the State's power structures and institutions (*ibidem*). What they propose is to adopt a secularism that would take into account the socio-demographic weight of each religion in the public sphere, a proposition which is raising suspicion and fear with the Christian politically dominant minority (*ibidem*).

In Burkina Faso, the debate on adapting the status of the *laïcité* is maintained mainly by Muslim intellectuals who have been educated within AEEMB and CERFI. More recently, the *Mouvement Sunnite* has even tried to push the FAIB to demand the ban of Christian symbols in the public space (the military, the administration, hospitals, universities, etc.) in the name of *laïcité*. However, in general the Burkinabé Muslim population perceive the debate on state secularity and institutions as an elite issue, a discussion that is carried on by intellectuals and that is at odds with everyday life and the public display of religiosity (ECDPM, 2020). It is also true, however, that some members of the Muslim community believe that *laïcité* should be abolished, in order to install an Islamic state that follows Sharia laws. This is becoming more common among young people, who are particularly sensitive to this topic and feel excluded by the dominant Christian minority.[20] In particular, this is a trait of the younger generation that breaks clearly with the older generation, which on the contrary tends to mediate conflict, rather than stirring it.[21] Finally, it has been also argued that despite the notion of *laïcité* and its application in today's Burkina Faso, secularism is a very complicated question and it is not strictly applied, as it is difficult to clearly split religion and state affairs. An example of this is shown by public office hours, which are open from 7:30 to 16:00 with a lunch break between 12:00 and 13:00. However, on Fridays, lunch break is between 12:30 and 13:30, with closing hours shifted to 16:30, because on Friday Muslims go to pray at 13:00. This shows that religion has a strong influence in public decision

[20] Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022.
[21] *Ibidem*

making and that a clear distinction between state and religion is still an important question in today's Burkina Faso.[22]

2.3. Opportunities

Opportunities (and challenges) of including political Islam in the governance of Burkina Faso have not been investigated academically. However, for inclusive governance experts, the inclusion of all the actors is fundamental to ensure the functioning of the State, rule of law and a peaceful coexistence. It has been recognized that including political Islam in Burkina Faso could require formal institutional changes but at the end there are more opportunities than challenges in the formal inclusion of political Islam (Interview 3, Inclusive governance expert, 14 May 2022). Even though not all Muslim leaders have a political agenda or an agenda that has Islam at its heart, it is recognized that those that are politically active are already implicated in the decision making process, as they act as advisors of decision makers in the national assembly for example, or in the ministries (Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022). However, this happens in an unofficial way, with no actual official recognition of their role in the governance of the country (*ibidem*; Interview 3, Inclusive governance expert, 14 May 2022). Recognizing an official role of (political) Muslim leaders would indeed bring some opportunities, such as a stronger link between the citizens and the State (Informal interview, Inclusive governance expert, 22 February 2022). The recent coup d'Etat highlighted that the State is currently unable to provide services for its citizens, and the support of the people showed that the state has been losing its legitimacy. Especially in the North and East part of the country, the State has been absent for years (International Crisis Group, 2020). Poor governance, underdevelopment and uneven social order have been fueling frustration and grievances of the population towards the State, but Islamic leaders stepped in and provided these services, being viewed as legitimate political actors (International Crisis Group, 2016). Hence, Islamic leaders can act as an intermediary between the population demands and the State. Moreover, ensuring inclusive policies would create a proper forum for Islamic leaders to voice their position and make Muslims' interests and needs heard (Informal interview, Inclusive governance expert, 22 February 2022). Statements made by religious leaders can have a greater impact on their community than those issued by secular leaders, as they could be considered more legitimate (International Crisis Group, 2016). For this reason, they are able to mobilize grassroots support, as they are trusted by the locals, and can influence cultural norms, making them crucial stakeholders in development (Informal interview,

[22] Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022.

Inclusive governance expert, 22 February 2022). Given the authority recognized to religious leaders, they can be important actors in solving conflicts and mediating disputes, especially at the community level. Indeed, people trust their opinion and listen to their suggestions even more than local traditional or state authorities (Interpeace, 2021). Finally, taking into account political Islam in local governance, including not only political parties but associations and civil society organizations, which form the basis of local political life, can foster a more inclusive local dialogue that would allow Muslims to voice their interests and concerns (Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022).

2.3.1. Local Dialogue

As already mentioned, in Burkina Faso many religions have been peacefully coexisting for years, also thanks to the local interfaith dialogue that has always been one of the strengths of the country. Indeed, religious leaders are aware that interfaith dialogue promotes a peaceful coexistence, and this is why they have been working together for example at the grassroot level, where also youth associations have been collaborating to encourage such a pacific coexistence (Interpeace, 2021). Religious leaders are invited to attend their counterparts' religious celebrations and exchange courtesy visits with them, during which they usually underline the importance of living together.[23] The FAIB engages periodically in dialogues with Catholics and Evangelicals, highlighting the existence of a real dialogue between the different religious structures (Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022). For example, in Dori, capital of the Sahel region in the northeast of Burkina Faso, the Fraternal Union of Believers of Dori (*Union Fraternelle des Croyants de Dori*) functions as a platform of dialogue between the different religions in the region, and has the objective to allow all the practitioners of religions to discuss and promote the values of the faith (Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022).

Nevertheless, Muslims have been voicing their frustration towards the public administration and the central State, which, according to them, have been favoring Christians and have not adequately taken into account their interests. They are not questioning the religious coexistence that characterizes the Burkinabè landscape, but what they are asking for is an equal treatment and real equality between religions ((International Crisis Group, 2016). However, young Muslims are found to be less patient than their predecessors, meaning that they could tend to question the

[23] An example of this the breaking of the fast at thearchdiocese of Ouagadougou at the end of 2022 Ramadan: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=230785579241740&extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&ref=sharing [Accessed on 11 June 2022]

status quo, and therefore threaten the peaceful coexistence of religions (*ibidem*). This is also the reason why they are drawn towards Wahhabism and extremist groups. It is therefore of fundamental importance to involve the youth in a local dialogue and religious exchanges that already happen. Associations that have been created by young Muslims, such as the "Coordination of Islamic Associations in the West", or the "Joint Interfaith Dialogue Committees/CMDIRs" which brings together the "Catholic Student Youth/JEC," the "Association of Muslim Pupils and Students in Burkin/AEEMB" and the "Union of Biblical Groups in Burkina/UGBB," should be included and involved in a local-led dialogue process that should aim at pointing out differences and commonalities among the Islamic religion itself and among the different religions present in the country, so to foster a comprehensive dialogue that would ease the path towards a better integration of Muslims into local and national public administration. Hence, an inclusive local dialogue between the different religions is crucial, as a lack of inclusive interfaith dialogue could push religious communities to retract into themselves. However, a dialogue among the Islamic currents themselves should also be fostered, as at the moment there are tensions among the traditional (Sufi) side and the Wahhabite (Salafist) side. Moreover, strengthening dialogue between Islamic leaders and State actors can favour a greater participation of the Muslim population in the local and national development projects, and can add value to the projects themselves, as religious leaders will share their community point of view and ideas and act as an intermediary between the people and the State.

2.3.2. Muslim Women

In Burkina Faso, Muslim women have contributed to the vitality of Islam, claiming their space in environments traditionally controlled by men (Madore & Gomez-Perez, 2016). On the one hand, main legitimate Islamic authority roles are still held by men, who closely control women's religious practices and community activities. On the other hand, however, (men) Islamic leaders have recognized the importance of including women in daʿwa (Islamic preaching) (*ibidem*). In recent years, Muslim women have started playing an important role in their communities, giving voice to gender matters that have usually been addressed by men. They exploited mass media to gain more prominence, and have been more active in associations to make their voice heard, without however ever challenging directly the male normative discourses. They gained prominence, for example, in AEEMB and CERFI, which were the first organizations to implement changes and include activities aimed at women's empowerment (*ibidem*). They also organized in the League of Muslim Women and Youth (*Ligue des femmes et des jeunes musulmans*),

created by Mohamed Bandé in the second half of 1980 and is the evolution of the Muslim Women's Community (*Communauté des femmes musulmanes*), which Bandé opened with the purpose of educating women to Islam, organizing courses in Arabic in order to read and memorize the Koran (Vitale, 2012). Moreover, inside Muslim communities (but not only) it is possible to find "strong and leader" women who have the important role to help other women navigate their spaces and carry out duties that are commonly associated with women. Hence, their role inside society is crucial to help other women, who would never approach or ask men (Interview 4, Political Islam and EU affairs expert, 16 May 2022.). However, the presence of women in political Islam is still an exeption, they are still excluded and invisible (Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022; Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022). The reason why this tends to happen is recognized in both education and religion itself, while to a lesser extent to Burkinabe's culture. Indeed, there are women leaders of Catholic or Protestant associations, but this is more rare in the Muslim community, because women are educated religiously and to stay in the back (*ibidem*). In order to change this and involve more women in the decision making process, it is necessary to educate both women and men and start a process of sensibilization of the society to these thematics (*ibidem*).

2.4. Challenges

As already mentioned, it is recognized that an inclusive role of religious (Islamic) leaders would lead to more opportunities than challenges for the governance of the country and localities. However, among the main challenges there is, for example, the rivalry between different Islamic actors that could friction the decision-making process and could hijack governance in general (Interview 4, Political Islam and EU affairs expert, 16 May 2022). Indeed, Islamic currents are competing with one another and accusing each other of not being "Muslim" enough (*ibidem*). Moreover, some groups reject not only other Islamic currents, but other religions as well, such as the *Mouvement Sunnite* and some others associated with CMBF. In the North, where the majority of the people is Muslim, Evangelical proselytism, for example, has triggered clashes with the *Mouvement Sunnite* (International Crisis Group, 2020). The rejection of recognition of other religions may hinder both an inclusive local dialogue and governance, spiraling the situation into violence. Finally, another challenge could be that the youth not always agrees with the older bulk of Muslim leaders that play a role in the politics of the State. What they voice is a lack of youth representation in the decision-making process, and therefore what could happen is that they could question the *status quo*, including the peaceful coexistence of religions, if their interests are

not met (Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022). The youth is particularly exposed to radicalization and violence, as they feel marginalized and excluded by the state, while extremist groups present themselves as a force for change against the perceived abusive practices of some local elites and the state.

2.4.1. Radicalization and Extremist Groups

Since 2015-2016, Burkina Faso has been the theatre of action of jihadist groups from Mali, namely the *Etat islamique au grand Sahara* (EIGS), the *Islamic State in West Africa Province* (ISWAP) and the *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM). The latter is linked to *al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM), and has merged with the *Ansarul Islam* group, the local Burkinabé jihadist group. JNIM, Ansaroul Islam, and the EIGS are fighting each other for control of territory, particularly in the eastern, Sahel, northern, and north central regions. These groups are characterized by their Islamist claims centered on the imposition of sharia law. Although they are present in Burkina Faso, not all members of these groups are Burkinabe. Some are Malian, Nigerian and other West African nationalities. They have gradually spread from neighboring countries such as Mali and Niger to become active in Burkina Faso (ECDPM, 2022). In 2019, Burkina was hit by more jihadist attacks than any other Sahelian country (International Crisis Group, 2020). Areas that have been mostly affected are the East, Boucle du Mouhoun, North and Centre-North regions, but also the capital Ouagadougou.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish between violent extremism and religious radicalization, as the rise of one does not automatically lead to the rise of the other. Indeed, an increase of religiosity, or fundamentalist Islam, does not necessarily translate in an increase of violence, as violence may be motivated by other reasons, such as greed, grievances, social exclusion and lack of opportunities (International Crisis Group, 2016). Yet, because of the Quranic interpretation that some Islamic leaders put forward, violence has been justified as a necessary means to achieve goals. Religion has been used as a channel to disseminate ideas that validate the use of violence, contributing to widening the societal cleavage (Interpeace, 2021). In the specific case of Burkina Faso, the rise of jihadist groups is an endogenous phenomenon, as fighters and commanders are mostly local, who want to achieve a set of local interests rather than establishing the Islamic law (International Crisis Group, 2020). Indeed, they usually lack religious instructions, and their ranks increase for a number of reasons related to: (1) The governance crisis that has hit Burkinabé rural areas; (2) Land-related injustices: these led farmers and herders

to join the jihadist ranks; (3) Social grievances, including lack of employment, stigmatization, exclusion, underdevelopment (especially in the North, which is underdeveloped compared to the South and the capital). Hence, jihadist groups have exploited rural tensions, injustices and the State's absence to establish themselves in Burkina Faso. However, it has been the youth who has mostly joined jihadist groups, as they feel excluded and neglected from accessing opportunities (Interview 2, Political Islam expert, 14 April 2022). Indeed, young people decide to join extremist groups mainly because they believe their socio-economic situation is insecure (International Crisis Group, 2020). The high unemployment rate, either if the person is educated or not, and lack of economic opportunities push the youth to join jihadist groups. The local population believe that if young people had jobs and economic opportunities, they would not resort to violence (Interpeace, 2021). Therefore, if on the one hand a military response to the jihadist threat is necessary to ensure security and stability, on the other hand it should not be the main and only answer. The military response should be coupled with addressing Burkina's societal rooted issues.

Given that fighters of jihadist groups in Burkina Faso are mostly local and are driven by local interests and demands, there seems to be room for dialogue. There are also testimonies that in Djibo, a northern town of Burkina Faso, a local dialogue between the local population and jihadist groups has happened, which exhorted the fighters to lay down the arms, after (now ousted) President Kabore visited Djibo and told the community leaders that he would have pardoned those who laid down their arms (The Defensive Post, 2021). Kabore's government reached an agreement with JNIM before the 2020 elections. However, according to some, the agreement was brokered in secret and was not supposed to last, even though civil society organizations recognized that the dialogue should have kept going, as both parties benefited from a pause in the fighting (Mednick, 2021). It is necessary to ensure that both those that are directly engaged in talking with the jihadist and the ex-fighters do not face reprisals from the national and/or local government. Moreover, it would also be necessary for the EU and international donors involved in Burkina Faso to back such talks, so that the government itself would be more inclined to promote such negotiations. However, given that at the moment the military is in control in Burkina Faso, a possible dialogue may happen in the medium term, as right now the priority is indeed restoring a democratically elected government. Once the government has power again, authorities could open a channel of communication and foster a dialogue to meet the needs of local fighters. Religious, and in particular Islamic, leaders might act as a mediator between the State authorities and the jihadists, together with organizations

specialized in mediation (Interview 1, Political Islam expert, 12 April 2022). It is crucial, though, to make sure that the local demands are met and that the actors are involved in the dialogue, in particular the youth.

3. The Role of the EU

3.1. How the EU has so far engaged, and what it can do

Burkina Faso has been caught by a downward spiral of insecurity and instability that started in 2016 and has been fueled by proliferation of terrorist and jihadist groups. Exclusion, poor governance and lack of opportunities have been recognized as the causes of the increasingly deteriorating situation, and the latest coup d'etat in January 2022 only highlighted these causes even more. In this context, the notion of inclusive governance at the territorial level is taking center stage as a way to address these root causes, and the EU has committed to promote a more solid inclusive governance that ensures the inclusion of key actors, who are however at the moment excluded from the decision making process, which is deemed necessary for social cohesion, popular resilience and also economic transformation (ECDPM, 2022a). The EU recognizes that a sustainable and effective inclusive governance in a fragile country as Burkina Faso cannot be conceived in a top-down way, but rather local dynamics should be stimulated by empowering local actors, in order for them to mobilize their resources and their social capital, and by granting local governments a role as a driving force for local development (*ibidem*). The vast majority of local governments lack legitimacy in the eyes of the population, as they are perceived as 'creatures of the central state' with little or no integration into the fabric of real local society (ECDPM, 2022), and this is even more true after the recent coup d'etat and the special delegations[24] installed by the military (Informal Interview, EU affairs expert, 6 May 2022). For this reason, the EU stresses that inclusive governance should include a process of re-legitimization of the role of the commune through the establishment of inclusive local governance mechanisms, such as accountability, transparency and the involvement of the civil society in decision making processes (ECDPM, 2022a). However, it must be said that such a territorial and bottom-up approach that the EU is promoting is fairly new also to the EU itself. Through its delegations, the EU has always adopted a top-down approach, as it has conducted negotiations and debates with officials of national governments rather than local ones (Informal interview, Inclusive governance expert, 22 February 2022). Its approach has changed also thanks to the advocacy work carried out by external actors that work in close contact with the EU and its delegations (*ibidem*).

[24] LeFaso.net, Burkina : Les collectivités territoriales dissoutes, des délégations spéciales mises en place, 2 February 2022. Available online at: https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article110974 [Accessed on 25 June 2022]

It has been recognized that the EU should take into account the place of Islam in governance and society (EU DEVCO, 2020), and recently the EU has engaged in local talks with political Islam leaders in Burkina Faso to ensure an inclusive governance (Informal interview, Inclusive governance expert, 22 February 2022). Nevertheless, formally and openly engaging in such talks with actors labeled as belonging to political Islam is still a sensitive topic for the EU, as there is an internal debate at the Member State level in which islamization is often equated to radicalization (Interview 4, Political Islam and EU affairs expert, 16 May 2022). Indeed, this applies only to Islam actors, as the EU openly engages with, for example, Catholic leaders or missionaries in Africa, without being confronted with any criticism (*ibidem*). However, as this bias has been brought to the attention of the EU, EU diplomats are being trained by the US State Department officials to better engage with religious, in particular political Islam actors, as the US diplomats have been communicating and entertaining relations with religious actors in a very different way (*ibidem*). Indeed, as the US recognized that religion has an increasingly important role in public life, in terms of shaping political discourse, social attitudes, institutions, and policy outcomes, American diplomats realized they first of all needed to understand these dynamics and develop tools to engage with religious actors to advance US policy interests. The State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affair was therefore created with the purpose of training American diplomats to better engage with religion actors, showing that there is more to Islam and security in the religion and idplomatic agenda, and engaging in broad topics ranging from fighting corruption, improving public health and protecting the environment (Mandaville, 2017).

The EU underlines that the exclusion of Islam actors, and especially the equation of islamization with radicalization, could reinforce the polarization of communities and strenghten the influence of more radical forces, which in the EU's perspective include (and is synonym with) Salafists (EU DEVCO, 2020). In particular, the non-consideration of these actors, says the EU, could indeed reinforce their victimized positions, justify anti-Western conspiracy rhetoric and explain the rallying of populations to their ideologies (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, the evidence so far indicates little direct engagement from the EU with, for example, Salafist organisations in civil society dialogues (but also non- Salafist Muslim faith-based organisations). In a recent study carried out by ECDPM, EU delegations diplomats have been found relatively uncomfortable with the term as well as the subject of Salafism, regularly making reference to the distinction between Salafist actors and organisations, and more moderate Islam (ECDPM, 2021b). This is explained also by the internal Member States dialogue that easily equates Salafism with violence and terrorism, and

therefore if the EU is seen by its public to engage with Islamic actors, its image at home gets tarnished (Interview 4, Political Islam and EU affairs expert, 16 May 2022). However, the fact that the EU automatically equates Salafism to violence and terrorism only highilights its uncomprehension of this Islamic current. Indeed, Salafists believe that the early generations of Muslims, know as the *Salaf*, closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad, are the example of the most authentic and true Islam, and therefore they imitate their habits, such as dressing like the Prophet. This is why they are also described as 'ultraconservatives.' Nevertheless, the large majority of Salafists are not involved in politics, as they are "skeptical of violent and nonviolent political participation," which in turn makes them being described as 'quietist,' resulting in a lack of understanding of the ideologies of the minority of Salafists who, on the contrary, are politically engaged Salafists (Olidort, 2015). Moreover, those Salafists that are also radicalized and jihadist are a minority, but given that most armed actors engaging in violent extremism are mainly affiliated with Salafi-jihadist ideology, including ISIS and al-Qaida, Salafism is now seen by the West as a main cause of radicalization (Faleg & Mustasilta, 2021; Hamid & Dar, 2016). This also explains why most of the programmes that the EU carries out on or with regard to Salafism focus strongly on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), mostly excluding other sectors such as health or humanitarian aid. P/CVE work supported by the EU is broad, including mediation, reconciliation and (inter-communal) dialogue, but also support to peacekeeping and (some) local economic development. Linked to P/CVE there is emerging work in the education sector, including instances where Salafist organizations are included as stakeholders (ECDPM, 2021b). The research carried out by ECDPM finds out that "in Burkina Faso, the issue of Salafism is not yet perceived as an urgent 'threat' [by the EU], although the issue of growing conservatism is being monitored, and [EU] delegation staff also expressed their interest in knowing more about the Salafist organizations, for example in the private sector. They also pointed to the general atmosphere of dialogue and efforts to promote national reconciliation in the country" (*ibidem*).

Given the recent developments in the country, what the EU could do is to foster a local dialogue by providing the opportunity and a safe environment to do so. For example, a first step could be to promote a round table between religious leaders of the three main Islamic currents that are represented in FAIB. Hence, since FAIB already is a conglomerate of these three main currents, their leaders could engage in a dialogue that would help them elaborate on their differences and commonalities, in order to find a common ground that would allow all of them to have more voice in the national decision-making process. However, as already mentioned, FAIB does not

have local representation and lacks local recognition. Therefore, on the one hand FAIB should work towards gaining more local presence and support, but on the other hand a local dialogue can already rely on already existing and youth led Muslim organizations (Informal Interview, EU affairs expert, 6 May 2022). Finally, the EU should also be ready to engage in "dirty deals," meaning engaging in talks with actors that are not the EU's ideal and first options, such as those (religious) actors that usually the EU classifies as more 'extremist' (Keita & Bossuyt, 2022). This would allow a better inclusion of all the actors that have an influence but are not usually consulted by the EU.

Conclusions

What can the case of Burkina Faso teach us?

Many international agencies, including the EU, are recognizing the importance of including marginalized actors, such as religious ones, in the state governance to foster peace, stability and development in society. In particular, in the case of fragile contexts, such as Burkina Faso, inclusion can fight marginalization and inequality, which are among the main endogenous factors that underpin Burkina's fragility, together with high cost of living, poverty, lack of economic opportunities and a mounting demographic pressure. In the context of Burkina Faso, Muslims have been voicing their frustration towards the public administration and the central State as their representation within the political elite and the civil service is low, even if they represent the majority of the population. Indeed, their influence and power is still limited as a consequence of colonialism, while national politics is controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, with Catholics populating high levels of state and management of both private and public organizations. The privileged political position of the Catholics stems from the colonial period, when they established their foothold through education and the provision of services free of cost for the colonial state. However, the youth, in particular, is more and more frustrated by unmet social demands and lack of inclusive national and sectoral policies to fight underemployment and unemployment. These social and economic dynamics make the young population an easy target for the recruitment by extremist groups who capitalize on grievances and lack of opportunities. Even though not all Muslims have a political agenda or an agenda focused on Islam, political Islam leaders, who have been so far excluded, should be officially included in the decision making process of the state. Indeed, those leaders politically active are already implicated in the decision making process, as they act as advisors of decision makers or ministries, but this happens in an unofficial way, with no actual official recognition of their role in the governance of the country.

The research question that has guided this thesis was: What challenges and opportunities does political Islam present in the framework of inclusive governance in Burkina Faso?. This thesis found that there are more opportunities than challenges in including political Islam in the framework of inclusive governance. Indeed, what the case of Burkina Faso can teach us is that the exclusion of an important part of the population, including Muslisms and youth, from the governance of the state and the decision making process can fuel frustration, marginalization and can breed radicalization if the population believes that there is no other way to find better opportunities. This can further destabilize the state, making it more fragile and vulnerable to

spiralling of violence. Political Islam leaders, given that they enjoy a degree of legitimacy in the eyes of the population, which instead is not enjoyed by the state's representatives, can play an important role of connection between the central state and the population, can provide services that the state is supposed to provide, and can mobilize the population is needed. It would also allow for an inclusive dialogue to take place, one in which especially youth should be included and heard, as young people are showing to be less patient than their predecessors and are starting not only to question the peaceful coexistence of religions that has characterized Burkina Faso, but also to be driven towards the more extremist fringe of Islam. Even though this thesis focused on a specific actor (political Islam) and a specific country (Burkina Faso), the broader argument found here is indeed the importance of including marginalized groups in the governance of state, to make sure that everybody's voice is heard, as the establishment of an inclusive society is key to ensure stability and development. Hence, the opportunities and challenges that this thesis highlights can be found also in other contexts of West Africa, and can help decision makers and international donors to adopt policies that ensure inclusion.

For what concerns the EU, the recent changes in attitude of the EU towards Islamic actors and the promotion of a more bottom-up approach is welcome. It seems like the EU is learning from past approaches that favored a top-down dynamic but failed to take into account the local realities and that did not produce the envisioned outcome, as it is moving towards a more local and people centered approach. However, the EU has still a long way ahead, especially in terms of understanding a religion that in Europe is still too fairly easily equated to exremism and terrorism. Salafism, for example, is too easily used as a synonym of extremism in the EU quarters, even though automatically equating Salafism to violence and extremism is a generalization of a more broad Islamic current that indeed contains extremist groups, but that should not be necessarily labeled as extremist. This attitude, however, is also a consequence of the mindset of EU representatives. In its external actions, the EU still portrays itself as a secular actor, and engages in actions and policies that are purely secular (Interview 4, Political Islam and EU affairs expert, 16 May 2022), given that secularism is an important aspect of the lives of Europeans, as seen in previous chapters. This attitude automatically excludes religious actors from the actions of the EU. This is why training on how the EU representatives should engage with Islamic (and other religions) actors, such as the one carried out by American diplomats, are needed to ensure the execution of inclusive actions. But what the EU should also do is act a change in its mindset towards countries where religion instead plays a key role in shaping social life. Rather than perpetrating and sometimes imposing (even though probably not purposefully)

its own views and visions on how society as a whole should work, the EU should be more open to embracing the specificities of that society and ensuring an inclusive approach. This is why the shift towards a bottom up approach is welcomed, but the EU should also bear in mind that its role should be more of a mediator and supporter of local dynamics, rather than trying to shape these dynamics by favoring actors that for the EU are easier to deal with.

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