

The War in Darfur: The Resource Dimension

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In 1983, at the height of the Sahel drought of 1982/84, skirmishes over land erupted between the farmers of Jebel Marra and the pastoralists of northern Darfur. Bad leadership at local, provincial and central government levels allowed the skirmishes to escalate to an armed conflict. A number of objective and subjective factors, one prominent of which was the closeness of the Libyan/Chadian war, helped in spiralling this deterioration. In 2003, war erupted and still continues in Darfur. In the process, skirmishes over land have become a war about identity; Sudanese of Arab origin are fighting against Sudanese of African origin. This remarkable transformation of a resource conflict into an ethnic war seems to be characteristic of many armed conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel region. Let a resource conflict endure and escalate and you end up with an identity war!

The escalation into identity war makes efforts to manage and resolve a conflict very difficult indeed. The only hope for Darfur today is that all concerned parties understand and agree to share resources in times of scarcity. However, the actual and potential resources of Darfur should make such sharing only temporary. Darfur with the size of France and endowed with water resources in aquifers, which could sustain the region's water needs for more than 250 years, as well as its huge possibilities of mineral resources especially Gold, Silver and Uranium could transform the region. It is also possible that Darfur may be endowed with oil. On left and right of Darfur, oil has been found in great quantities. The skirmishes were about resources; even the conflicts were about resources. The war, however, has become predominantly about identity. It will be difficult to manage, resolve and ultimately transform this tragic conflict. The human and natural resources of the region could ultimately be the only practical way to restore sustainable peace. Resources could be a curse under unwise leadership. But under favourable circumstances could definitely be the best way towards sustainable peace.



1. The Environment: A New Dimension in the Sudan's Political and Social Landscape

In the Sudan, as in most other parts of the continent, human and animal life depends on the delicate balance of soil, climate, water and flora. During the last four decades, this equilibrium has been upset, particularly in the vast arid and semi-arid areas of the northern half of the country. In addition to the persistent drought, unsustainable methods of land-use, such as large-scale mechanised rain-fed farming and overgrazing in marginal lands, are destroying the Sudano-Sahelian ecozone in which 70 per cent of Sudanese live. Millions of people have been forced to abandon their homelands and have become displaced (in Arabic *Naziheen*); so many in fact that the Sudan has the highest proportion of internally displaced people in the world -one in every six.

1.2 The Resource Miners

The slow processes of natural wear and tear on the environment have been accelerated enormously by the unprecedented extraction of natural resources. This is being carried out by members of the northern Sudanese traditional merchant class, known as the *Jellaba*, prompted by their assimilation into the world market in the restricted role of extractors of primary resources. In addition, loan conditionalities imposed by the World Bank and the IMF have considerably boosted the restructuring of Sudan's resource utilisation away from local needs and the local markets towards the demands of the international market. Large-scale mechanised farming has destroyed some 17million hectares through unsustainable land-use. Deforestation has denuded the whole of northern Sudan from large extended pristine forests that is an area 3 times the size of France. The current government continues with this disastrous policy. In one single act in 1993, the government distributed 8 million hectares to its supporters. One single person was allotted half a million hectares or about half the land area of Lebanon for a few thousand dollars! (Suliman, M., 2000, Resource) The unsustainable exploitation of resources has been compounded by a steady decline in international terms of trade, brought about by the collapse of primary commodity prices, which has had a knock-on effect on the local market, where terms of trade have also worsened. To maintain their living standards, the peasants and pastoralists have to produce more from a shrinking resource base. If they fail to do so, they will have no option but to relocate and join the millions of dispossessed and asset-less poor.

1.3 Mobility Curtailed

In the past those in distress simply moved to a nearby richer ecozone. However, this 'exit option' is increasingly being hampered by an expanding population, large-scale mechanised farming, political and ethnic tensions and a general worsening of the environmental situation. As central government control of law and order in the countryside is weakened, physical security considerations are also becoming increasingly important in the decision of people to abandon their homelands and move to urban centres, where food is in relatively greater abundance and physical security is relatively better maintained.



The movement of people and herds from one affected ecozone to another, which is already occupied by a different ethnic group, is a recipe for tension and hostility. Conditional agreements used to be reached when the need for sharing land was occasional, but now that this need is for prolonged periods (or even for permanent sharing), the strains are much greater. These difficulties are particularly prevalent in eastern Sudan and in the drought-stricken areas of north Darfur and Kordofan.

It is, in fact, no longer possible to analyse properly and understand any major social or political phenomenon in the Sudan without due reference to the climatic and ecological transformations that have beset the country of late. They are crucial factors in understanding the conflict in Jebel Marra in Darfur and in the Nuba Mountains in southern Kordofan. They played an important role in the precipitation of the 2nd civil war between North and South. They also shed light on the rapid urbanisation taking place as a result of some six to seven millions of war and drought-displaced people moving to urban areas and the role of these Naziheen in contemporary Sudanese life and politics.

1.4 Ethnicity

For decades, the notion of ethnic (so-called tribal) differences dominated most attempts to explain violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. By pairing the rich spectrum of ethnic diversity found in the continent with the culture of competition induced by harsh environments and restricted access to natural and social resources, ethnic violence came to be regarded as the natural state of affairs (Fukui & Turton 1979). In this view, ethnic conflict is part of the historical baggage modernising African states have been saddled with, both product and indicator of the cultural conservatism and traditionalism found among the rural population.

But the standard interpretation of African ethnicity as a leftover from primordial conditions has attracted criticism from the 1960s onwards. Anthropologists came to challenge existing assumptions about ethnicity as a quasi-ontological base of human identity, with reference to such phenomena as cultural conversion, situational identity, the uneven distribution of cultural properties and the invention of tradition (Barth, 1969; Ranger & Hobsbawm 1983; Holy, 1987; Eriksen, 1993). Ethnicity, far from presenting a historical leftover, has been recast as a modern phenomenon, with people re-tribalising in the face of pressure so that ethnicity is no longer seen as a cause, but rather as a consequence of war, (Fukui & Markakis, 1994 also Gurr and Harff, 1994). However, with the passage of time an inversion of ethnicity from being an effect into being a cause is indeed possible.

1.5 The Effect of Time

Many violent conflicts continue over long periods of time, hence the need to understand what time does to causes, perceptions and manifestations of violent conflict.

The passage of time blurs some processes, enforces others and obliterates some altogether.

We can only guess what the consequences of today's acts will be, given the number of objective and subjective factors in action and the very real possibility that a subjective factor may invert and become an objective one and vice versa.



This paper shows the possibility inherent in prolonged violent conflicts that some factors, like ethnicity, and cultural and religious affiliations - initially abstract ideological or political categories effective mainly in the realm of perception - can be transformed by the passage of time into objective, social forces. Ethnicity, for example, often the product of violent conflict, can end up becoming an objective cause of enduring or future violence, proving that, with time, effects can become causes.

Ethnic, religious and cultural dichotomies remain, however, very potent in people's perceptions of violent conflict. However, the longer a conflict endures, the higher the ethnic barrier will rise and the greater the possibility that the ethnic divide will augment the initial causes of the conflict and may even surpass them, with time, to become the dominant factor.

Most violent conflicts we studied appear to start over material resources, whether these resources are actual or perceived. With the passage of time, however, ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations seem to undergo transformation from abstract ideological categories into concrete social forces. In a wider sense, they themselves become contestable objective social resources and hence possible objects of group strife and violent conflict.

Usually by-products of fresh conflicts, ethnic, cultural and spiritual dichotomies, can invert with the progress of a conflict to become intrinsic causes of that conflict and in the process increase its complexity and reduce the possibility of managing and ultimately resolving and transforming it. The war in Darfur began as skirmishes between farmers and herders over concrete material resource, land. With the progress of time and increase of loss of life and material belongings, ethnicity began to immerge as a second cause of the conflict. Further aggravation of the fighting and greater loss of life and belongings shifted the ethnic to the fore as the most important motivation for the conflict. The conflict became ethnic and resource conflict. Still further and greater losses will transform the conflict into an identity conflict.

*Resource conflict ---- human& material losses ----- resource and identity conflict -----
human& material losses ----identity and resource conflict ----- human& material losses -----
- identity conflict*

(See Suliman, Mohamed, 1998, The Inversion of Ethnicity from Perception to Cause of Violent Conflict, Friedensbericht, Verlag Ruegger, Zurich)

1.6 Ecological and Ethnic Borders

Ecological borders are, in many cases, also ethnic and cultural borders. Different ecozones demand different social production systems. In rural Africa, this means different land-use systems. In semi-arid zones, the pastoral form of production is viable and has survived. Over the years, pastoralists acquired their distinctive cultural and ethnic traits compared, for example, with their neighbouring sedentary peasants. Ecological borders have gradually become ethnic and cultural lines of demarcation, where people meet to cooperate or to fight.



These adaptations to variant ecological habitats produce corresponding differences in material culture and aspects of social organisation like language variation, social traditions, dress and culinary features, which are major ethnic identification criteria. These differences become critical as soon as quarrels arise over the allocation of entitlements in a shared or in a newly discovered or occupied resource. As a result, marginal lands are often the flashpoints of much larger structural conflicts between neighbouring groups. As each contender seeks to attract maximum support, ethnicity is the loudest rallying cry. As Markakis noted (Fukui & Markakis, 1994), of all ideological weapons used in African warfare - nationalism, socialism, religion and ethnicity - the latter proved by far the more superior as *a principle of political solidarity and mobilisation* as well as a dominant political force (italics are mine). The outcome is that discord over material resources, once clothed in the symbolism of ethnic survival and fuelled by the vicious circle of revenge, can simmer long after the initial resource dispute has been settled.

In the past, the prevailing tendency was for people to cooperate along these buffer zones, exchanging goods and services and sharing the use of renewable resources. The ethnic/ecological borders were borders of cooperation, not confrontation. However, competition over resources and natural services has intensified because of environmental, social and economic pressures. The equilibrium of war and peace has gradually, some times abruptly, shifted towards confrontation. In the process, people and livestock, tanks and tractors cross these ecological and ethnic frontiers. For instance, the Zaghawa pastoralists, suffering from persistent drought in the plains, entered into the Jebel Marra Massive planning to stay there as long as the drought continued. The Baggara want similar privileges for themselves in the Nuba Mountains. The Tuareg conflict in Niger and Mali, the Casamance conflict in Senegal, the turbulence in the Boran region in southern Ethiopia; all are examples of such resource conflicts.

Conflicts over economic and renewable natural resources are thus, sometimes, incorrectly seen as ethnic/cultural, simply because the warring factions come from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

Somalia is a land of great ethnic, religious and cultural 'purity', but when competition intensified in the early 1990s over control of the state and the economy and for a greater share of the renewable resource base - mainly land and water - the contestants evoked sub-ethnic, clan differences and fought along these clan lines for economic gains and state control. Rarely have wars proclaimed their true motives and the Somali conflict is no exception. However, if the violent conflict in Somalia continues unabated for a number of years these weak clan barriers will harden into strong ethnic divides and will eventually become objective causes of violence in their own right. That is why it is generally easier to resolve recently emerging violent conflicts than settle old ones.

An additional complication is the spread of modern weapons which has transformed African warfare from predominantly a demonstration of power to large-scale killing. The new weapons kill many people so quickly that the available time for mediation and intervention is drastically reduced, compounding the difficulties facing peace-makers in current African conflicts.



2. The War in Darfur or the Incessant Struggle between the Oasis Farmers and the Desert Nomads

In an attempt to understand the impact of ecological change in northern Darfur on the state of war and peace in the contemporary history of this region, the most striking observation is that the settled farmers and the pastoralist nomads are 'causally' interlocked in a complex solidarity/strife relationship with each other. They exercise mutual solidarity in times of normal hardship, but in times of severe hardship, when bodily survival is literally at stake, they engage in mortal combat.

The armed conflict that has been raging since the mid-1980s in the Jebel Marra Massif in Darfur appears as a typical ecological conflict along distinctive ecological borders, in this case the borders of the semi-arid planes roamed by 'Arab' pastoralist nomads and those of the 'wet oasis' of Jebel Marra of the settled Fur farmers.

2.1 The Impact of Ecological Scarcity

The relatively tranquil setting of northern Darfur was profoundly disrupted during the 1980s by the prolonged drought - which has persisted with only minor interruptions since 1967 - and the ensuing and unprecedented mass population movement, impoverishment and destitution of the inhabitants of the affected arid and semi-arid zones. A number of studies have been carried out into the social and economic impact of the drought on these people (ElNur, 1992), yet little attention has been given to its impact on low and medium intensity armed conflicts. This has resulted in entrenching some grave misconceptions; on the one hand, the implications of environmental degradation are confined to the economic and social spheres; on the other, the resulting conflicts are explained in terms of their ethnic and political manifestations.

It is not only plausible, but actually desirable, to investigate how environmental change is influencing the different social and political events in the adversely affected areas. In this respect, Darfur is a case in point, being one of the worst distressed regions in the country, as well as the one most affected by the compound problems of environmental degradation and prolonged armed conflict (de Waal 1989; Maxwell 1991; Tobin 1985).

2.2 The Drought in North Darfur and Kordofan

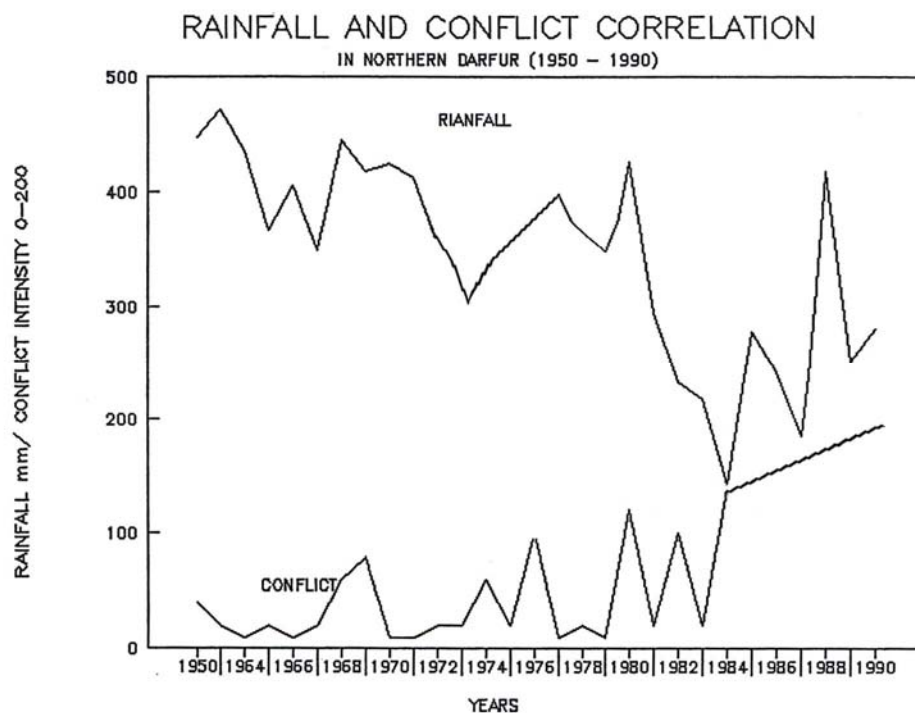
Drought is an inherent feature of the arid regions of western Sudan, north Darfur and Kordofan. There have been five drought disasters over the last hundred years. Two of these, however, have occurred in the last twenty years Of the 20th century alone. In these regions - lying between the isohyets 100mm and 600mm - a mere 100mm decline in the mean annual precipitation could bring people and livestock to the brink of disaster.

Rainfall data covering the period 1950-1990 reveal three major spans of drought, a relatively mild one in the mid 1960s, and a slightly sever one in 1973-1975 and a very severe one in 1982-1984. In all three cases the draught was accompanied by flaring of skirmishes, the worst of which took place in the mid-1980s and assumed the form of medium to high intensity conflict and then later war.



The diagram below correlates rainfall data to conflict intensity over a 30 year period (1957-1987). The diagram reveals two interesting patterns: an increase in incidents of conflict with the corresponding decrease in rainfall and a lag between minimum rainfall and maximum conflict intensity of roughly one year, a relaxation period for the impact of the draught to take full effect (see figure1 below).

Figure No.1: Rainfall and Conflict Correlation in Northern Darfur 1950 – 1990



The diagram also exposes an anomaly between the impact of the draught of the mid-1970s and that of the mid-1980s, which were of medium and severe intensity respectively, but the latter caused far greater social turbulence (see figure 1).

The drought of the 1980s brought famine, displacement and armed conflict on a much larger scale than that of the 1970s. Possible explanations of this apparent discrepancy could be:

- I) In the 1970s, the agricultural food production of the Sudan was geared towards the internal market, while in the 1980s food production was geared towards export.
- II) During the 1970s, the regional food and other reserves of Darfur mitigated the impact of the drought. The 1980s found these reserves depleted.
- III) In the 1970s, the local traditional administration was still functioning and supportive. In the 1980s, it was abolished by the government of Numerei.

IV) In the 1970s, there was no large-scale warfare in the Sudan or neighbouring countries, while the 1980s saw the emergence of the civil war in the Sudan and the Chadian-Libyan war had been large-scale and wide-spread.

With the onset of the drought, rural economies begin to fall apart. Livestock began to die in large numbers and livestock owners were forced to dispose of their remaining herds for very little. City merchants turned away from the collapsing rural economy, leaving it to its own fate. Abandoned by both nature and the market, famine and poverty took hold. Life became a real struggle. At this point, rural society was ripe for dislocation, turbulence, and, ultimately war. That is exactly what happened in northern Darfur in the mid-1980s.

2.3 The Land

The boundaries of Darfur region lie between longitudes 22° E-27° E and latitudes 10° N-16° N and it covers a total area of 549 square kilometres (an area as large as France). The region is located in the remote western part of the Sudan which borders Egypt, Libya and Chad. The total population of the region is estimated at between 4.5 to 5.5 million.

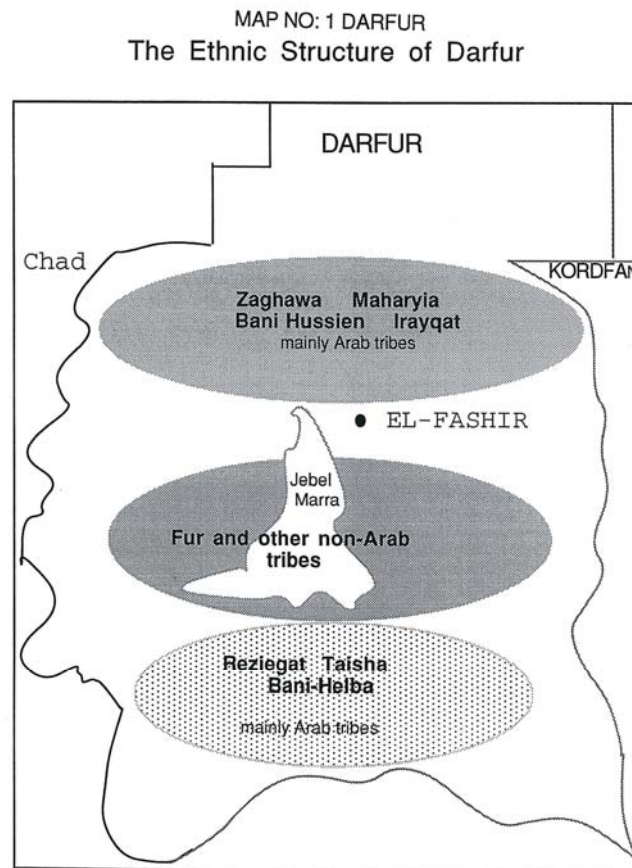
The people of the region are divided into two main ethnic groups: those who are of Arab origin, and the local non-Arab population. This division is consistent with, and further emphasised and sharpened by, the occupational and territorial structure of the region.

The occupational composition in Darfur follows perfectly the ethnic lines of the subdivision. The Arabs, who are mainly nomadic, are either cattle or camel herdsman, whereas the non-Arab indigenous people - with the exception of the Zaghawa - are settled traditional small-scale farmers.

Although the region's name - Darfur - in Arabic means 'the homeland of the Fur', (the main indigenous tribe), the region is actually divided into sub-territorial tribal areas each locally known as the Dar ('homeland', in Arabic). Each Dar makes up the social, political and cultural identity of the group, which perceives the Dar as the embodiment of its prestige and its collective living and cultural space. Hence, and despite the official division of the region into provinces, councils etc - the traditional Dar divisions remain most significant within the different ethnic-livelihood communities. The region is traditionally divided into three main Dars. In the North there is Dar Zaghawa, in the centre the Dar of the Fur people, and to the south Dar Reziegat. Other small ethnic groups also have their Dars (see Map 1)



Map No.1: The Ethnic Structure of Darfur



2.4 The Ecology

The climatic and vegetational conditions of northern Darfur are typical of the Sahelian ecozone within which area relief is the major differentiating factor. The volcanic Jebel Marra massif and its northern prolongation, which peaks at 3071 metres and covers about 100,000 square kilometres divides the western highlands from the lowlands in the east. While the former is dominated by shallow sekeletal soils (immature soils constantly exposed to erosion) and fluvial erosion, the latter is covered by thick sandy soil of old dunes. In contrast, the soils of Jebel Marra show an altitude-controlled zonation. According to the FAO Report of 1968, the piedmont is covered with deep sediments of volcanic ashes which are very well suited for cultivation, but they are also highly inclined to erosion and the formation of deep gorges. Terraced farming has, therefore, been practiced here by the Fur tribes for a very long time (Ibrahim, 1984).

The northern half of the area has a hot, dry desert climate, while the southern half has a hot dry steppe climate. The dry season spans 10-12 arid months in the north, and 7-9 months in the south and west, including the highlands of the Jebel Marra. The annual mean temperature is relatively constant at around 26° C. This very high annual mean has considerable influence



on the water balance of the region. The substantial deficit in the water balance constitutes the major ecological problem of northern Darfur.

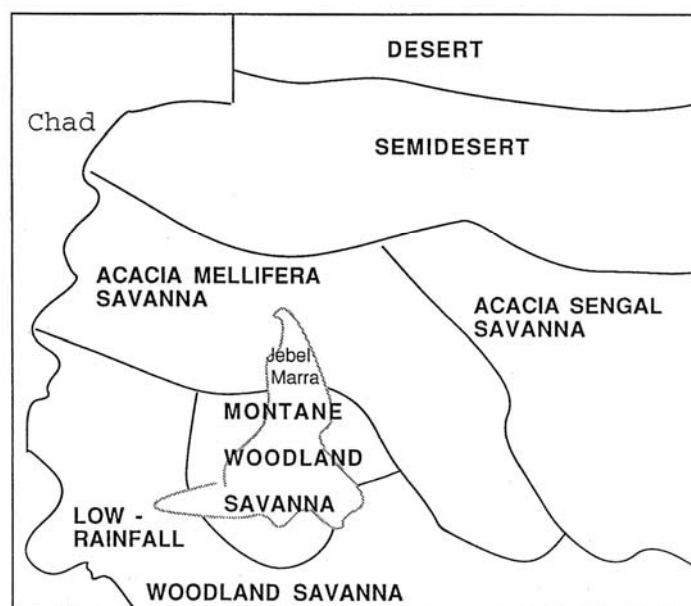
Maps of water deficit in the Sudan show Jebel Marra as a 'wetter island' with annual precipitation of 600-1000mm compared to 200 - 500mm in the surrounding plains (see Map 2). The rains begin earlier in this wetter zone (April), but they end about the same time as in the drier zone (October). Both zones, however, show great variability of precipitation in time and place, with about half the annual average falling in August and again about half of this month's precipitation falling within a span of approximately five single days. In the past, land-use systems were adapted to these huge fluctuations in rainfall. Rapid increases in human and livestock populations over the last few decades, coupled with the encroachment of rain-fed mechanised agriculture beyond its ecologically adapted limit of 500mm isohyets in the sandy soils of Darfur, has made the whole region vulnerable to wide-scale ecological degradation.

The fragile environment of this region eventually began to suffer under the impact of climate variations and unsustainable human intervention; the result: bloody disputes over dwindling resources.

Map No.2: Vegetation Zones in Northern Darfur

MAP NO: 2 DARFUR

Vegetation Zones in Northern Darfur



2.5 The Dars

As stated earlier, Darfur can be broadly divided into three main ethnic territories: *Dar Zaghawa* of the camel nomads in the north, *Dar Fur* of the peasant Fur community in the centre, and *Dar Reziegat* of the cattle herders in the south and eastern parts. Ecological degradation has affected these zones in noticeably different ways, because each zone occupies not only a distinct ethnic and occupational band, but also a distinct ecological zone. Because of this peculiar and rather unfortunate enclosure of the three diverse ethnic groups within three distinct ecological zones (see Map 3), the possibility of 'ethnic' conflicts among the inhabitants of the three horizontally stacked eco-systems is especially great. This highly sensitive ethnic-environmental dichotomy can in times of scarcity and need easily ignite the flames of conflict.

2.6 The Northern Arid Zone

The first of these three zones is the upper northern band, which is a desert spread of the Libyan Sahara inhabited predominantly by Arab camel nomads. The tribal-ethnic structure of this zone is as follows: The Bideyat and Zaghawa are non-Arab 'tribes', and the Mahariya (Reziegat), Irayqat, Mahamid and Beni Hussien are Arab 'tribes'.

This zone is the most disaster-prone and ecologically fragile of the three Dars, a fact that partly explains why it is vulnerable to ethnic conflict and why its ethnic groups have always been active participants in the armed conflicts of the region; if not against settled farmers, then amongst themselves.

2.6.1 The Central Rich Zone

The middle eco-ethnic zone of the Jebel Marra Massif is the richest area in the region in terms of soil fertility, rainfall, abundance of surface and underground water, and other natural resources. The occupants of this area are settled traditional farmers. They are mainly non-Arab indigenous people of the region. The major ethnic group in this zone is the Fur after whom the whole region is known.

The people, all non-Arab, who live within and around this central zone, are: The Fur, the Masaleet, the Berti, the Bargu, the Bergid, the Tama, and the Tunjur. Unlike the nomads in the upper and the lower zones, the pattern of life in the agricultural communities of the Fur central heartland is characterised by peaceful co-existence and harmony within its ethnic groups. Not a single major incident of open ethnic warfare has occurred within this group.

The recorded conflicts that took place in the most susceptible upper and lower zones were mainly due to intrusions by the cattle nomads coming from the south, or camel nomads moving from the north into the farmlands of the Fur peasants. Unlike most other parts of Darfur, this region is ecologically stable, unscathed by severe droughts or other environmental malaise.

2.6.2 The Eastern and Southern Semi-arid Zone

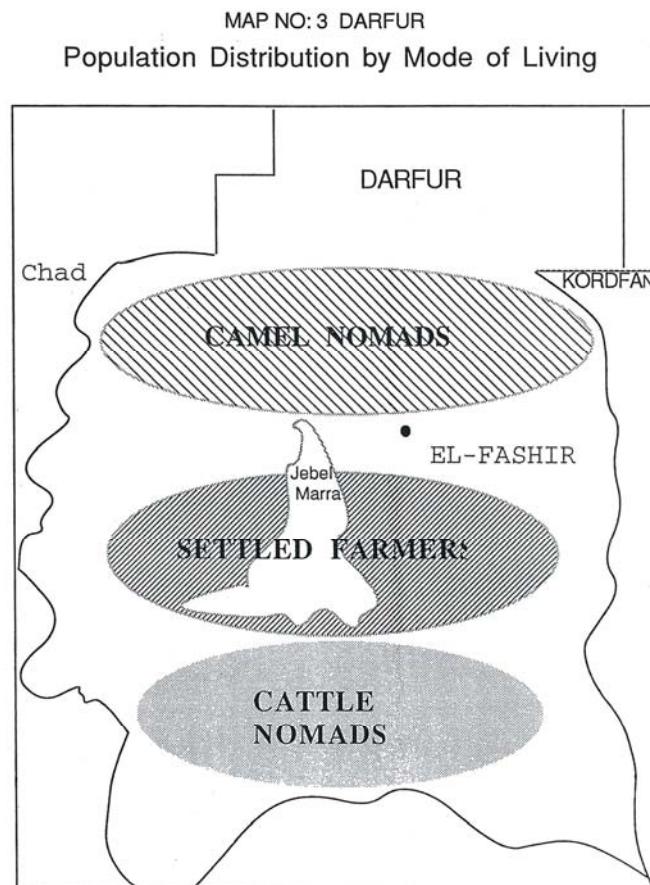
The southern zone of Darfur, which includes the eastern boundaries of the region with the



neighbouring region of Kordofan, is inhabited mainly by cattle pastoralist nomads. It is less stable ecologically than the central zone, but has only been partially affected by the recent droughts.

The mainly cattle-herding Arab 'tribes' in this lower zone are the Reziegat, the Habbaniya, the Beni Helba, the Taaisha, and the Maaliyya. Although ecologically more stable than the northern zone, it is still highly sensitive to fluctuations in rainfall. This zone has suffered from drought during the last two decades to the extent that some of its nomad inhabitants were forced to migrate to urban centres or move into the wetter central Fur-land zone.

Map No.3: Population Distribution by Mode of Living in Darfur



2.7 The People

Ethnic distinctions in Darfur, as is the case for Sudan in general, are not that clear cut. Following the two main sub-divisions, the population in Darfur can be broadly divided into those of Arab descent, and the local, non-Arab indigenous inhabitants of the region. Although some of the Arab groups claim an unmixed Arabic stock, it is important to note that they are Arab only in a cultural rather than a racial sense. The name Arab, therefore, stands for those Arabic speaking people, who, through a long historical process, have mixed with the indigenous non- Arab Sudanese.

The indigenous Darfurian tribes consist mainly of settled farmers and small-scale traditional cultivators, generally referred to as the Fur. They are the largest ethnic group in Darfur and were the founders of the Fur Sultanate and the traditional rulers of the region. The other non-Arab ethnic groups are the Zaghawa nomads, the Meidob, the Masalit, the Berti, the Tama, the Mararit, and the Tunjur. These non-Arab groups established '*The Darfur Development Front*' (DDF) in the mid 1960s to the exclusion of all other ethnically non-Darfurian people. The main objective of the Front was to protect and lobby for the interests of the indigenous Darfurians in the political scramble for power at the centre.

The Arab tribes in Darfur are mainly pastoralist nomads. They consist of the Habbaniya, the Beni Hussein, the Zeyadiya, the Beni Helba, the Djawama, the Reziegat and the Mahariya. To them, we add the urban merchants and government officials who are mainly of Jellaba origin. These communities formed what is known as '*The Arab Congregation*' in the mid-1980s, an alliance designed to lobby for official and financial backing from both the central government, and the national political parties in support of the cause of the Arabs in the region.

As suggested by Ahmed and Harir (1982), the population in Darfur can also be divided using a different classification into four groups, the Baggara (cattle nomads), the Aballa (camel nomads), the Zurga (the local name for non-Arab peasants derived from the Arabic word for black), and the inhabitants of the urban centres (see Map 3).

A more culture-oriented classification is adopted by Ibrahim (1984), who distinguishes between four groups: the Arabs, the fully Arabised, the partly Arabised, and the non-Arabised. The Arabs, according to him, are the native Arabic speakers: The Reziegat, The Zeyadiya, the Beni-Hussein, and the Djawama nomads, who, as a result of intermarriage with the indigenous Darfurians, look much darker than non-Sudanese Arabs. The fully Arabised group refers to those locals who lost their native languages to Arabic. The Berti and the Tunjur belong to this group. The third group - the partly Arabised - consists of those who have retained their native languages, but also speak Arabic fluently. Among these the author lists the Fur, the Zaghawa, and the Meidob. The last group in this classification is the non-Arabised tribes who speak very little Arabic, for example, the Masalit, some sections of the Zaghawa, the Bergid, the Mima, the Tama, and the Kenana.

O'Fahey (1980) adopted a different classification. He pointed out that, ethnographically, Darfur is one of the least charted regions of the Sudan, a fact which makes the classifications in terms of Arab/non-Arab divide rather ambiguous, rendering the genealogical approach unworkable. The structure suggested by O'Fahey relates migration, linguistic and occupational factors in identifying the ethnic structure of Darfur.

This paper will, however, adopt a broader approach, one that combines both the genealogical/occupational and the culture-area approach to define ethnicity in Darfur. According to this hybrid approach three main population groups can be identified, each sharing a common pedigree, the same occupation as well as the same culture-area.



According to this alternative approach, the first group will be the nomadic camel and cattle herders, who identify themselves as Arabs. Following their common perception, this term is loaded with nomadic self-esteem, a feeling of superiority, and a tendency towards violence. For this group, sedentary farmers and other rural groups are inferior, not only ethnically but also culturally, by virtue of their occupation. They are looked down upon as the dwellers of the *Tukul*, that is, the kitchen - a reference to their sedentary life-style. The Dar (the homeland) is revered by this group as an embodiment of the status and the prestige of its people. To defend the Dar against intruders each sub-ethnic division - *Khashum Bait* - has its own strict military organisation headed by an *Ageed*, that is, the leading warrior. This structure resembles that of a typical military democracy as was known, for example, among the 'barbarian' German tribes, who brought down the Roman Empire. Like their European counterparts, these herder/soldier groups neither refrain nor disdain from raiding and robbing the 'despised' farmers, especially in times of scarcity. Armed raids against other groups, mainly in rich agricultural areas, constitute an important anti-destitute strategy in times of major natural calamities. As rightly argued by de Waal (1992), it is not hunger that matters in times of scarcity or famine, but the social and emotional implications of displacement away from the Dar that most worries the members of this group. De Waal argues that for the rural people in western Sudan, who are normally prepared to put up with a considerable degree of hunger, the elements of famine that are most feared by these people are, in fact, destitution and the breakdown of the social fabric of the Dar.

The second group comprises the sedentary farmers and small-scale cultivators. These are rural-based people, mainly non-Arab and predominantly Fur. Traditionally, they did not have, nor needed to have a military organisation, unlike the aforementioned nomadic groups. For these people, Darfur is their own homeland and non-Darfurians are but intruders into their region. Although traditionally inclined to peaceful life, the Fur sedentary farmers are often engaged in skirmishes with cattle and camel nomads over animal intrusion in their farms. As a result of these frequent clashes, both groups harbour a degree of animosity and mutual mistrust.

The third culture-area and occupational group consists of traders, government officials, absentee-landlords and urban-based professionals. Unlike the other two groups, who have limited political influence, this third group plays an important role in the political and economic life of the region.

2.8 The Economy

As already stated, Darfur is one of the regions adversely affected by the unequal pattern of regional development in the Sudan, a situation created by the biased attention of the elite ruling class towards the relatively rich central region, which over the years has received the lion's share of public and private investment resources at the expense of the rest the country. The local economy of Darfur has, therefore, all the features of a sub-exploited region, that is, of a region that is suffering the double predicament of underdevelopment within an underdeveloped country.

Such regional disparities are one of the most striking features of the Sudanese economy and they reflect, as argued by Gore (1987), an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, as well



as between the rich urban centres and the deprived rural areas. Gore maintained that, while it is true that the gap between rich and poor countries of the world is widening, it is also evident that the gap between the rich and the poor classes/areas within developing countries is widening at an even faster rate.

The production base of Darfur's economy evolves mainly around traditional rain-fed agriculture and livestock, the latter having the greater market share. These activities are intermixed with more minor, traditional small-scale crafts and cottage industries. The other sectors of the region's economy are of negligible magnitude. The service sector in the region is also of limited economic impact and includes only the very basic services of government administration. The inadequacy of the transport sector and other infrastructures is particularly responsible for the current state of economic fragility of Darfur.

The agricultural sector can be divided into the small-scale subsistence, household-based farming activities which dominate the rural communities and produce mainly for family consumption, and the medium- to large-scale mechanised farming schemes which are market oriented. The latter produce food grains, tobacco, fruits, vegetables and groundnut. Across both sectors a shrinking gum-Arabic production also contributes small additional incomes, especially to subsistence farmers.

The main contribution of Darfur to the national economy is its livestock sector. It is in this sector that the Jellaba acts as middlemen for the internal market and the international livestock trade. In the year 1985-1986, this livestock trade accounted for 50 per cent of the Sudanese balance of payments (Table 1), and for 20 per cent of the entire GDP. The share of Darfur in the national livestock trade is 30 per cent, and the region hosts around 25 per cent of the country's livestock population.

Table 1: Sudan livestock and cotton export value and share

1981/82 - 85/86 (in millions of US \$)				
<u>Year</u>	<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Cotton</u>	<u>Total exports</u>	<u>Livestock share</u>
				%
1981/82	99.7	99.4	432.0	23
1982/83	128.8	174.6	581.1	22
1983/84	133.2	333.3	722.2	19
1984/85	197.3	245.0	595.4	33
1985/86	237.5	136.0	497.4	50

Source: World Bank Country Report: Sudan 1992, 1992

Table 5: Population division by mode of living in Darfur and the eastern region

Consistent with this bias towards animal husbandry is the dismal record of public sector investment in the region. The few, and only agricultural development projects attempted are: the Jebel Marra Integrated Rural Development Project; the Western Savannah Agricultural Project; the Western Sudan agricultural Research Project; the Sag El-Niam Agricultural Project. With the exception of the Jebel Marra Project, the other three projects were complete economic failures and are text-book examples of how ill-designed rural development projects can be.



3. A General Overview of the Armed Conflict in Darfur

The armed conflicts among the various ethnic groups in Darfur have experienced two major phases in their development: the low intensity, sporadic 'tribal' raids and skirmishes which characterised the disputes from the 1950s to the 1980s, and the high intensity, persistent and large-scale armed conflicts, that have been fought since the mid-1980s. Whereas the early confrontations were easily contained and resolved, current conflicts have proven too unwieldy to manage through the traditional, time-tested methods of conflict resolution.

3.1 The Escalation of Armed Conflict in Darfur

Since the mid-1980s, the occasional minor skirmishes over water and grazing land have gradually increased in intensity and frequency and have developed in 2003 into fully fledged warfare. Tens of thousands of human lives have been lost in an unprecedented bloodshed; whole villages have been wiped out and burnt, property looted and plundered and hundreds of thousands forcibly displaced.

Different conflict management strategies were followed by the different governments of the day, but their efforts proved ineffectual, and, on several occasions, the central government has been accused of actively supporting one group against the other.

3.2 Past Confrontations: Skirmishes

Conflicts prior to the mid-1980s were of low intensity in nature, highly localised in area, and infrequent. Rarely were more than two groups involved. Examples of such conflicts include the Zaghawa versus the Mahariya in 1968; the Maaliyya versus the Reziegat in 1968; the Reziegat versus the Miseria from 1972-74; the Beni Helba versus the Mahariya from 1975-77; and the Taaisha versus the Salamat from 1978-81.

3.3 The Present Confrontation: War

The current full-scale civil war in Darfur started as a medium intensity conflict in 1985 at the height of the drought that ravaged the region. The main trigger to this conflict had been the break-down of the economic ties between the Fur farmers and the mainly Zaghawa herders. In the past, the herders were allowed to enter the mountains around December when grazing became poor and were allowed to stay in the mountains until the first rains in April/May. The herders were allowed into the mountains because of two reasons:

1. The farmers owned part of the livestock the herders cared for, so they had common economic interest
2. Animal droppings enriched the soil and ensured good crops in the coming season.

In 1984/85, when the animals began to die, the Fur farmers withdrew their remaining animals and sold them all for little money. When the following poor grazing season approached, the Zaghawa and Meheria herders approached the mountains as usual, but the farmers refused them entry. Many farmers burnt the stalks left after the harvest and some even closed their wells. The herders had no option but to try and enter the mountains by force. That is how the armed conflict in northern Darfur began.



This conflict has been fought in two rounds. The first was between the Zaghawa and the Mahariya camel pastoralists of the upper northern desert belt, against the settled Fur farmers; the second involved all the non-Arab farming communities of the Jebel Marra area against a broad coalition of virtually all Arab nomads. Since then, and despite the efforts of four different governments, the conflict has continued unabated.

Contrary to the earlier, localised skirmishes over water and grazing land, the post-1985 conflict has shown a systematic drive by the nomads to occupy land in the central Jebel Marra Massif. Whereas the previous disputes were spontaneous and lacked both intensity and persistence, this new conflict has turned from recurrent low intensity conflict into regular war. The nomadic scramble from the impoverished Dars into the rich agricultural central heartland of the Fur is the cause of the continuing conflict; it is the contest of the drought stricken for the green oasis. Whatever the perception of the conflict, it is one which has been fought primarily over the control of a thriving resource base in the middle of a zone of scarcity. It is an almost classical ecological conflict.

3.3.1 The First Stage of the Armed Conflict (1983-87) the Zaghawa and Mahariya versus the Fur

In the first stage, the conflict was strongly related to the harsh drought, which afflicted the region, especially in the early 1980s. During this period many nomads from the drought stricken areas - both Zaghawa and Arabs - moved southwards into the Fur region. Realising that on this occasion the nomads intended to stay for longer, the Fur reaction was far from welcoming. Fearing the worst for themselves and their animals, the herders entered the mountains by force. The response of the then governor of Darfur (a Darfurian himself) to the occupation of Fur land was certainly legal but not wise. He ordered the police to drive the intruders out of the occupied land.

The Zaghawa suffered at the hands of government forces, who accused them of animal rustling and land occupation. Numerous incidents were reported of government forces (both police and army) burning down Zaghawa villages and ex-judicially executing Zaghawa local leaders. The Zaghawa were left with no choice other than to arm themselves against the onslaught of government soldiers.

Events spiralled out of control and led to wide-spread use of modern weapons by all parties involved (Zaghawa, Mahariya, Fur and the army). Machine guns such as Kalashnikovs, AK47s, and G3 assault rifles, together with Gronovs, RPGs, explosives, heavy machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades were all in common use. Africa Watch (1990) estimated that at least 50,000 modern weapons were available in Darfur during this period, one for every man above 16 years of age.

The modern weaponry used in this conflict was supplied to each faction by its outside supporters, whether the Sudanese, Libyan or Chadian governments or organisations. Use of such modern arsenal increased the number of casualties and severely aggravated the situation.



Soon after the involvement of these external forces, the conflict acquired the reputation of being an ethnic plot concocted by a regional Arab conspiracy. Attempts at understanding the root causes were hampered by the shift of emphasis from the economic/ecological to that of the ethnic/political arena.

3.3.2 The Second Stage of the Armed Conflict (1987-2003) the Arab Alliance versus the Fur

The second stage of the war (1987-2003) climaxed into ethnic polarisation and proved to be more aggressive and destructive than the first. As a result, combatants and independent observers seem to have lost sight of the root causes of the conflict.

The excellent documentation of the conflict by Harir (Harir 1992, 1993:1, 1993:2), rightly points out the significance of the so-called "curse of the strategic position" of the Fur homeland, straddling the Jebel Marra Massif and its slopes, which, as already mentioned, are the richest areas in the entire drought stricken region.

Harir argues that because the Fur area was blessed with environmental resources, it became accursed by the influx of the nomads. He maintains that the second phase of the conflict, which started in 1987 and involved 27 Arab tribes in an alliance, called the '*Arab Congregation*' not only declared war against the settled Fur farmers, but against all the Zurga (blacks), and non-Arab groups of the region. The Janjawid (meaning Jinni on horse back) were the vehicle of Arab aggression against the Fur and by extension against the blacks of Darfur. In response, the Fur organised their own 'Militias' initially for self-defence and later to forge a link with the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army, the SPLA.

The second phase of the war has been very valuable in revealing the ecological roots of the conflict. The main target of the nomads, as documented in many cases, was not the Fur farmers but their land. As reported by Africa Watch (1990), before a raid, the Arab nomads would give a day's warning to the villagers - the Fur farmers - to vacate their village and make way for the Arabs. Harir (1992) drew attention to the fact that the Arabs called the lands from which the Fur had been 'cleansed', the liberated lands.

The conflict has inflicted a high toll on population and resources. It is estimated, that by the time a peace conference was convened in 1989, more than 5,000 Fur and 400 Arabs had been killed in the second phase of the confrontation. Tens of thousands have been displaced, 40,000 homes and huts had been burnt, and hundreds of people disabled. In addition to this, millions of pounds worth of livestock and other property had been lost.

Yet, in spite of its high cost in human and material loss, the conflict had continued unheeded nationally and unnoticed internationally. Two factors have contributed to this state of affairs: firstly, the prevalent perception that that was yet another traditional inter-tribal conflict in a very remote area; secondly, the conflict had been overshadowed by the civil war in the South with its intriguing ethnic, political and religious overtones.

The widespread misconception about the nature of the conflict, coupled with an almost total disregard for the impact of ecological degradation in the region, has led the government to



take the absurd line that further troop deployments will eventually resolve the conflict. We have heard of the lashing of the sea to subdue the waves, so it is not surprising that a government with so much security concerns has deployed troops to overcome a drought-related social crisis.

4. The Third Stage of the Conflict, War.

Early 2003, a well equipped and trained 'army' attacked El Fashir, the capital town of the province of Darfur. The government was taken by full surprise. Hasty attempts to regain the upper hand failed miserably. The two movements and armies that started the challenge belonged to the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), (not to be confused with the SPLM of South Sudan) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The two movements were a strong response to the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of African people, mainly Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit. The government was later able to respond to the new situation. It increased the training and arming of the Janjawid and sent large numbers of soldiers and military equipment to the region. At last, the government was able to achieve a stalemate in the battle field.

4.1 The Darfurian Rebel Groups and the Prospects of Peace

The SLA/M group, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army named itself after the SPLM/A, the Sudan's People Liberation Movement/Army in an obvious attempt to follow the path of its big brother. The SLA was made up of Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa fighters, most of whom came to the SLA as civilians with little political or military experience. What brought them together was their discontent with GoS and their shared Darfurian identity. The Zaghawa group was by far the better organised and equipped, having had access to much more money from their large network in the Sudan, Libya and Chad. The Fur and the Zaghawa, however, harboured mutual mistrust, which has often culminated into sporadic and bitter fighting.

None of these groups trusted the other. Especially so the Fur and Zaghawa who had a history of bloody confrontations during the 1980s. This undisguised animosity has later led to the downfall of the SLA united and its division into the Zaghawa faction headed by Mini Minawi and the Fur faction headed by Abdel Wahid.

One other source of disunity was the mistrust between the young rebel leaders and the traditional local administrators. The Sheikhs tried in vain to restrain the young rebels and have in the process lost their authority.

The other main rebel group is the Justice and Equality Movement, JEM, which is strongly associated with Dr. Turabi and his party, the Popular Congress Party, the PCP. The JEM leader, Dr. Khalil Ibrahim, a Zaghawa, had indeed held important ministerial positions in the NIF government. Although he and other JEM leaders strongly maintain that they have broken all ties to both The NIF and Turabi, mistrust of JEM still prevails. The JEM's military capacity is far inferior to that of the SLA, but their political vision and structure are much better developed having so many seasoned politicians in its leadership.

4.2 Abuja and the Darfur Peace Agreement, DPA

The TV pictures, however, of the misery of so many people and the injustice inflicted upon



them, have moved the hearts and minds of millions of people world-wide. The force of public opinion forced the United Nations into action. The UN organised the Abuja platform and brought the government and the opposition to the negotiating table. The negotiations dragged into many months of futile debate. At last, on the 5th of May 2006, Mini Minawi signed the Abuja peace agreement with the government of Sudan, the GoS. The Fur representative, Abdel Wahid refused to sign. Again the Fur and the Zaghawa went their own ways. Mini was under very strong pressure from the USA, GB and the EU, his field commanders, however, were certainly not. 19 of his top commanders defected and formed the G19, Group 19. By the end of 2006, Mini's SLA had only a few hundred men, a far cry from its original force of some 10,000 men! Although Mini is now the fourth-highest executive in the GoS, he has virtually no authority in Khartoum and very few fighters in Darfur.

The Fur, the biggest tribe in Darfur and other African tribes who have suffered most and who constitute the great majority of the displaced, were left out of the agreement. The hasty quick fix was strongly supported by the US and GB, which could perhaps be explained by the need of these two countries for a success story. They needed to convince the world that their intervention in Darfur was prompted by pure humanitarian motives, probably to give some credence to their interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan!

The effective fighting groups are now the SLM/A four major factions and JEM. However, there are now efforts going on to unite all factions of the SLM/A. For a while, all major groups came together in the so-called National Redemption Front, NRF, an umbrella front for all non-signatories to the Abuja Agreement, on June 2006 in Asmara. "For some months, groups on the ground coordinated their military activities under the NRF banner, at least nominally. But by late 2006, the NRF was beset by internal tensions created mostly by its success, which can be as hard to manage as defeats" Victories gave rise to jealousy and mistrust and hence to divisions! (Tanner and Tubiana)

The Abuja agreement is dead. Mini Minawi is more dead than alive. The Fur are divided into two factions, the Zaghawa into several and the JEM still does not have the trust of most Darfurians

I fully agree with Tanner and Tubiana that 'some degree of unity among the rebels is necessary before fresh negotiations can take place'.

The forces that exerted such great pressure on Minawi have now the moral responsibility to assist the UN to bring the rebel groups together and beyond that, to convince all Darfurians to work together for peace, unity and development.

4.3 The Packers of the Rebels

Where did the SLM and the EJM obtain their arms and logistics? They maintain they have taken their arms from government troops and weapon stores. This is only partially true. Most of their weapons, however, must have come from other sources. One can only speculate as to which these are. Chad and Eritrea are credible sources. However, money collected for the cause is plausibly the major source.



The humanitarian situation is still dire. Humanitarian help for the refugees is getting through. What is most alarming, however, is that a new status quo has been established. Many so-called Arab tribes have occupied fertile areas in Jebel Marra for almost 20 years now. If world opinion insists in returning the refugees to their home lands, which is a rightful demand, what are they going to do to those who have made these lands their home for so long? Where would the forces be take them? Where would they have to go? And above all, how are they going to achieve that goal?

The displacement of Jebel Marra people has created a new and dangerous situation. It no longer is that obvious and straight forward the demand to return all refugees to their rightful homes. It certainly has to accommodate the situation of those who moved into their lands and made it home for so many years.

4.4 Why was the Initial Stage of the War a Typical Environmental Conflict?

The enemies confronting each other in this enduring war have a long history of guarded cooperation and relative peaceful coexistence. In the past, the Arab and the Fur fought skirmishes over land and animal intrusion, but never engaged in large-scale war. Their current conspicuously polarised and antagonistic ethnic stand is more a product of the war than a cause of it. Not only are all the participants in the conflict Sunni Muslims - albeit never militant in their belief - with Arabic as their lingua franca, but their feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group had no vicious antagonistic implications. In Darfur, ethnicity had functioned as a matrix for cooperation, not confrontation. The different Darfurian groups were never strongly ethnic-tribal in their criteria of mutual identification and hence in dealing with each other. The low ethnic barriers that existed among them were friendly and easily surmountable by intermarriage and/or similar processes of assimilation in a fluid exchange of ethnic affiliation.

As Abdul-Galil (1984) noted, ethnic identification along the four criteria of territory, linguistics, occupation and genealogy is rather a situational phenomenon. The actual processes "involve the evaluation by the actors of the situations they find themselves in". In the market place, where appearance or clothes are not useful means of identification, "linguistic mapping" assumes special importance. If not content with the linguistic definition, the parties may resort to one or to all the other three indicators as additional identification criteria.

To his surprise, Abdul-Galil learnt that even the solid boundaries of the dominant tribal entities the Fur, the Arab and the Zaghawa were in actual fact porous and responsive to change. He cites the example of the Djawama of Turra, believed to be of Arab origin, who settled in Turra and became Fur as well as that of the Tekera of Tekerabe, the Arab Reziegat, who became Zaghawa.

Nothing save a catastrophe could have stifled the fluid relationships between these open ethnic groups. The huge intervention that so polarised the people in this region and had its climax during the 1980s was certainly the Sahel drought.



4.5 Why has the Government Sided with the Pastoralists in the West and Opposed them in the East?

The sectoral structure of the economy of Darfur reflects the important position held by the livestock economy in comparison with farming and other production and services sub-sectors. Livestock export earnings had registered a steady, impressive rise (as shown by the figures in Table 1) from as low as 13 per cent during the mid 1970s to 23 per cent in 1981/82, and then to a record level of 50 per cent in 1985/86, the year in which it even surpassed cotton export earnings, the traditional pillar of Sudan's balance of payments.

The predominant part played by livestock in the economy of Darfur (as the source of surplus extracted by the Jellaba traders), both in terms of internal trade proceeds and export earnings, has its bearing on the ongoing conflict in the region. This surplus source factor greatly influenced the government's decision to side with the nomads against the farmers in Darfur, but had exactly the opposite effect in the East.

Compared with the surplus generated by agricultural farming activities, which are mainly subsistence in nature, the main economic contribution of Darfur to the centre and hence to the broader national surplus extraction cycle, is through livestock trade for the local markets and, most importantly, for export.

This is contrary to the situation in the East, where the main source of surplus originates in the large mechanised farming sector. That is why the government - and the Jellaba - supported the absentee landlords of mechanised agriculture against the nomads in eastern Sudan, despite their Arabic ethnicity, and left them with no alternative other than to "practically fight their way through the farms which block their seasonal routes to the traditional grazing areas" (Ahmed, 1992).

Whereas the triumphant nomads roam Darfur 'liberating' land and driving farmers from their homes, with the complacent approval of the government, their next of kin in the eastern region were reduced to the dismal position of having to choose between either to abandon their traditional way of life or fight a losing battle to retain it.

The government's position in both conflicts is determined by the interest of the surplus extractors, the Jellaba, who are the absentee landlords in the east and the livestock traders in the west.

It is interesting that the government opted to support the nomadic groups in Darfur although, in terms of relative weight of population, they account for only 15 per cent of the population - a small minority compared to the rural farmers who account for 74 per cent of the area's population. This electoral power of sedentary peasants had little impact on successive undemocratic regimes that chose to side with the livestock nomads, not only because of economic interests, but also in order to secure the military support of these sturdy people in implementing their aggressive policies in the region and in the country at large.

Since the early 1980s, successive central governments have actually organised thousands of Arab nomads into armed militia (Murahaleen) and indeed used them practically as a second armed force.



5. The Islamic Ideological Dimension of the War

Parallel to the economic interest that aggravated the war and kept it going for so long and with such grave losses, there is an additional ideological factor that contributed to the ferocity of the war. It all began during the late 1980s, when several Fur members of parliament belonging to the Islamist party resigned from it because their Islamic Alliance Front sided with the Janjawid against the Fur. Then the worst case of "betrayal" to the party and government took place in October 1990, when Daoud Boulad led a military uprising in Darfur against the Islamist government. The small force was defeated and Boulad was executed. Boulad was, however, a leading Fur Islamist. He was even earlier the president of the Students' Union of the University of Khartoum on behalf of the Islamist group. That was another big shock for the governing Islamic party.

The then head of the Islamic movement in the country and the grey imminence behind every major policy decision, Dr Hassan El Turabi, told the newspaper *Al Sudan* on the 22nd of February 1992 about his plans for Darfur:

The Islamists belonging to the Negroid tribes have become enemies of the Islamic movement. The plan of the Islamic Front is to support the Arabic tribes by taking the following measures: the forceful relocation of the Fur out of Jebel Marra and into Wadi Salih and completely disarm them. We will replace them with the Mahariya, Al Etiafat and Al Irayqat (Arabic tribes). We will disarm the Zaghawa and move them away from Kutum and into Um Rouaba in Kordofan. We shall arm the Arab tribes in order to make them the nucleus of the Arabic, Islamic congregation.

This plan of crazy social engineering looks suspiciously like one of Hitler's "total solution" strategies. It envisaged the forceful deportation of almost 3 million people from their traditional homelands. However extreme it may be, it is indeed the plan adopted and practiced by the current Islamic government. Although the ruling group have parted with Dr. Al Turabi, yet his distorted and inhumane plan still dominates the killing fields of Darfur. Economic interest does indeed play a big role in precipitating armed conflicts, but other objective and subjective factors do contribute to the mayhem. It is indeed unfathomable that such an inhumane plan should have been considered at all, let alone that a responsible government would attempt to execute it in the realm of reality!

6. Peace in Darfur means Equitable Sharing of Resources in Times of Scarcity

As previously argued, the war in Darfur is essentially an attempt by the drought-stricken livestock herders to drive the Fur out of their fertile 'wet' oasis. The Arabs are trying to capture the entire region and drive away the Fur, who, in turn, are fighting to retain their land for themselves.

That was the root cause of the bloodshed. It is astonishing that attempts to resolve the conflict have not given this crucial factor due consideration. Instead of advising some sort of resource sharing - ecological power sharing - reconciliation attempts have concentrated on political power sharing.



In an article in 'Der Uberblick'(September 1993), Lothar Bauerochse reports how the warring tribes in southern Ethiopia have managed to resolve a long-standing conflict over the area's dwindling resources by agreeing on an equitable sharing plan, which recognises the 'right' of the Borana over their rich homeland but also the 'right' of their suffering neighbours, for example, the Konso, the Tesmay and the Arbore, to survive. All parties concerned accepted a plan for peace that allows livestock to enter the land of the Borana immediately after the sorghum and maize harvest. This breakthrough was cemented by further agreements relating to cooperation in resource rehabilitation and development as well as to mixed education of their children. Observers of the peace negotiations and ceremonies from aid and development organisations pledged to support the peace initiative by giving material aid to its implementation.

In the case of Darfur the persistent calls for political power sharing seem to come from the urban elites belonging to both sides of the conflict, rather than from the affected people themselves. In 1993, the time I published my first report on the armed conflict in Darfur, I suggested the following four-point plan for long-term peace in the region:

1. To stop all hostilities and agree to negotiate peace on the basis of the 'right' of the Fur over their land and the 'right' of the nomads and their animals to survival. This should entail temporary sharing of some grazing land and water resources. It is important in this respect to rely on local leadership rather than on 'the boys from town', who most of the time lead the negotiations toward their own personal interest, for example, negotiating a share of political power at the centre, rather than solving the actual problems facing the opposing sides
2. To prepare, with government help, plans for sustainable land-use aimed at mitigating the impact of the drought, and for long-term rehabilitation of the affected areas. Important in this respect is the gradual substitution of large-scale rain-fed farms by regulated animal husbandry through the controlled use of pastures. Also important is the targeting of national and international development and aid programmes towards achieving lasting peace, namely environmental rehabilitation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of available resources.
3. To diversify the production base of the area by developing labour-intensive manufacturing and handicraft cottage industries with the purpose of absorbing both labour and produce surplus of the peasants and livestock herders.
4. To develop the transportation and telecommunication systems in order to link the people of Darfur and their economy to the rest of the country and the world at large.

The success of such a plan would have largely depended on the will of the warring parties for peace as well as the need for the central government to be an active partner in the process, and on the regional powers Libya and Chad to refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of Darfur, and of course on the explicit targeting of development programmes and aid to cool down social turbulence.



However since 2003, the conflict has taken larger dimensions. Certainly the four points are still valid and needed, but the grave situation that exists now demands a much broader approach for conflict management, conflict resolution and above all for the long-term objective of conflict transformation, which deals with the structural problems and deficiencies that plague the whole region of Darfur. The start is definitely is to find workable ways to achieve resource sharing and resource management and development.

The scale of the problem demands immediate action on national and international scales. A Roundtable Conference with participation of all war factions, the government of Sudan, all political parties and civil society organisations as well as international organisations especially the United Nation, the African Union, the European Union and others to seek an agreement on guiding principals, the most paramount of which is sharing resources in times of scarcity and of course the development of existing and potential resources of Darfur. One important example is the development of the huge underground aquifers that contain enough water to satisfy all the water needs of Darfur for more than 250 years. There is also a plausible possibility of finding oil in the region, especially after discovering oil west and east of Darfur in the Sudan and Chad.

We also know that Hufrat al Nihaz (the Cupper Basin) in southern Darfur does promise high yields of Gold, Silver, Uranium and other valuable metals and minerals.

The resources started the armed conflict, but have the potential of transforming Darfur into a prosperous place. Four perhaps five million people in an area the size of France and with such plentiful potential resources should be able to live in peace and prosperity. Resources could be either a curse or a blessing depending on which way we use them.

To Sum up: *The potential for conflict transformation in Darfur lies in the sustainable development and use of all existing and potential resources of the region. Resources can also be a blessing!*

Dr. Mohamed Suliman
London
March 2006



Darfur rainfall data 1950-1988 in millimetres

Year	1950	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Average	535	565	502	424	410	408	484	496

Year	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Average	495	424	445	330	468	382	408	449	445	392

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Average	451	377	275	270	143	381	241	232	418

Source: Annual Rainfall Reports 1955-1989, Meteorological Dept, Sudan.

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