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Understanding the Conflict in Darfur

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Professor Mohamed Salih presented his paper on the Darfur crisis at a public lecture at the Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, on 12 April 2005.

Professor Mohamed Salih was a Visiting Professor at the Centre of African Studies in the autumn semester 1998 when he planned and introduced a new course in environment and natural resources in Africa. He has since been a regular visitor to the University of Copenhagen and given annual lectures on topics from his current research work.

During a visit in early 2002 Professor Salih attended a research seminar on "Religious NGOs in Africa" where he presented a pioneering paper on Islamic NGOs in Africa. The paper was published as an Occasional Paper in March 2002 under the title "Islamic NGOs in Africa: The Promise and Peril of Islamic Voluntarism".

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Summary

Media reports and even scholarly coverage of the Darfur crisis have to a large extent maintained that it began with the Darfur Liberation Movement's attack on the Sudanese Armed Forces' garrisons in 2002. The impression is sometimes given that the Darfur conflict is a result of a civil war which started in the South and eventually radiated to Darfur, including notably the southern Blue Nile, Eastern Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Abyie regions – some of the most underdeveloped and marginalized regions of the Sudan.

However, instead of exploring only the events leading to the conflict, this paper attempts to trace the root causes of the crisis to the distant history and to cumulative as well as recent factors that shaped the events which produced this crisis. In particular, I'm interested in the NIF ascendancy and its strong affinity with the Darfur political elite. Paradoxically, the Darfur political elite had initially found refuge in the NIF Islamic ideology, which claims the existence of a non-differentiation Muslim umma (or community), only to be marginalized by some elements in the NIF leadership who claimed a superior Arab ancestry for themselves.

In this paper, I argue that explaining the Darfur conflict in terms of Arabs versus Africans or ethnic cleansing devoid of historical conflicts is grossly misleading and may also lead to erroneous prescriptions of how to resolve the current crisis.

Background¹

State formation in Western Sudan is not new. In *State and Society in Darfur*, O'Fahey (1980) introduces what he calls the three pre-historic states of Daju, Tujur and Wadai (1500 – 1650 AD).² These states were considered pre-Islamic, referring to the fact that Islam did not spread to these remote parts of what was still by historians considered ancient Sudan.³

In O'Fahey's words:

In the 17th century among the non-Arab populations of western Darfur Islam had made little inroad on their traditional beliefs, but was gradually beginning to grow in little nodules of influence radiating out from the Keira Sultan or tribal leaders, to whose courts the first *fuqara* (holy men or learned men *ulama*) began to find their way.⁴

These three states either co-existed or succeeded each other like the case of the Daju and Tunjur; and Tunjur and Wadi, respectively. The existence of these states speaks of a vibrant political society, with sophisticated system of government which ruled over diverse populations and vast masses of land. These ancient African states had developed administrative structures with semblance of bureaucracy, taxation and revenue levying systems and rules and regulations that governed the relationship between ruler and subject.

Between the 17th and the late 18th century, Keira state of Darfur adopted Islam which also contributed to the Islamization of the state, although it

1 In writing this background, I have relied heavily on the work of Professor O'Fahey, one of the prominent and most respected Darfur scholars. Other works in the region will be referred to in order to plug in materials on the economy and society and how these have contributed to the current mayhem.

2 O'Fahey and Spaulding 1974, pp. 108-116.

3 Ibid.

4 O'Fahey's 1979, p. 193

never applied Islamic law, also known as *sharia*, or banned traditional rituals and beliefs, which co-existed with Islam. According to O’Fahey, Islamization took the form of acculturating the people of Darfur to the Islamic/Arabic culture of the Muslim hinterland.⁵ A stream of holy men called *fuqara* or *ulamma*, mostly of an Arabic descent migrated to Darfur and some of them became part of the courts of the Sultans. The numerous Arabic names that the reader encounters in O’Fahey and Spaulding’s work, give the impression that the Fur elite and Arab holy men set themselves apart from the people and formed a well connected yet competing aristocracy over land, slaves and prestige.⁶

As the Arabs had already settled in large parts of Darfur, the relationship between the two oscillated between peaceful co-existence, wars and intrigues, influenced by two major intrusions: 1) the intensification of the slave trade, in particular the presence of powerful northern Sudanese slave traders such as Al-Zubayr Rahama, and 2) the occupation of the Sudan by the Turco-Egyptian rule which contrived to extend its influence to Darfur as well as controlling slave tycoons such as Zubayr Rahama. The Turco-Egyptian rule sponsored and encouraged its own slave traders such as Muhammed Al-Bahlawi in order to rival Al-Zubayr.⁷ Zubayr was able to outwit all his rivals and was victorious in his numerous slave trade expeditions or wars to eliminate rival traders.

However, Zubayr was able to force the Rizayqat Arabic-speaking nomads, also continuously attacked by the Fur, to become his allies. It is this alliance that contributed to the downfall of the first Darfur Sultanate in 1874. When Al-Zubayr entered Al-Fashir, the capital of Darfur, it did

5 O’Fahey and Spaulding 1974, p. 165.

6 Ibid. particularly the sub-title “The Sultans and their Slaves”, which explains this vividly”, pp. 171-175.

7 Ibid. pp 179-182.

not take long before he became an ally of the Turco-Egyptian ruler of the Sudan who bestowed on him the title Pasha.⁸

What could be deduced from the 18th and 19th century Darfur is that governments and elite alike have never ever treated the people of Darfur kindly. O'Fahey's pioneer work illustrates the nature and type of servitude exacted by these two institutions on Darfur society. Injustice, including slavery and high taxations or dues was common feature of 18th and 19th century state-society relations in Darfur.⁹ War was a recurrent affair, which explains how desperate the elite vying for the control of resources in the form of taxation, revenue and slaves, could be so brutal and disrespectful of human dignity. O'Fahey lists 37 financial duties¹⁰ that Darfur subjects must fulfil to their rulers, some of whom are not even of Darfur origin.

The rise of the Mahdiya revolt (1881) against the Turco-Egyptian rule has also brought mixed fortunes to Darfur. If Northern Sudanese Arab slave traders and Turco-Egyptian rulers like Zubayr Rahama, used Darfur as a source, staging hub, transit point for slave raiding operations, the Mahdiya turned it into a pool for the recruitment of soldiers. This time around, the successor of the Mahdi known as Kalifa Abdullahi of the Ta'aisha Baggara nomadic groups of Darfur introduced a policy of forced migration to Omdurman, the capital of the Mahdiya state. The forced migration policy was exacerbated by a power struggle between the high brass of the Mahdiya ruling elite which was racially divided into *Awlad al Balad* and the *Asharf*, referring to the commoners i.e. forced immigrants from Western Sudan (both Darfur and Kordofan) and riverine or northern Sudanese ethnic groups to which Al-Mahdi, the leader of the Mahdist

⁸ Ibid. p.183.

⁹ O'Fahey 1980, p. 92.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 103-104.

revolt belonged. The ethnic cleavages within the Mahdiya were deep and the stakes were high i.e. the ability of the movement to remain united under the impending pressures of internal (the 1886 famine) and external (the British posture to occupy the Sudan) events. Ironically, the wounds of those cleavages left their marks even in today's Umma Party and its diverse leaders' struggles for power and control.¹¹

Darfur maintained relative independence from the Mahdist state. Unlike the Baggara, who claim an Arab ancestry, and who joined the Mahdiya en mass, the Fur joined the anti-Mahdiya revolt in 1888, lead by Abu Jummayza. After subsequent leaders, Ali Dinnar, the son of Sultan Mohamed Al-Fadl and a Keira descendent, returned to Darfur and re-established the administrative structure of the Sultanate. He ruled the Darfur as an independent state until the Anglo-Egyptian rule annexed it in 1916.¹²

Sudan's independence from the Anglo-Egyptian rule in 1956 marked a new era in at least three sets of relationships as far as Darfur is concerned: 1) it marked the emergence of new alliances based on the ethnic background of political parties. The Umma Party gained popular support in Western Sudan particularly among the Baggara and other African tribes including the Fur. Grandsons (literally male heirs) of Darfur pre-twentieth century rulers, both Baggara and Darfurians, rose to positions of power within the ranks of the Umma Party. 2) Due to human and livestock population growth, urbanization and proximity to central government, recurrent droughts and famine, competition over local resources such as land, water points and grazing resources intensified. 3) The Umma Party's monopoly of Western Sudanese votes was

11 O'Fahey and Spaulding 1974, p. 186.

12 Ibid.p.186 and for more details see Theobald, 1956.

gradually challenged by Darfur-based regional movements such as the Front for the Renaissance of Darfur (*jabhat nahdat Darfur*), the Muslim Brotherhood movement and its successors the National Islamic Front (NIF) and National Congress Party.¹³ The paper deals with these constellations and their contribution to Darfur's current political and humanitarian crisis.

These points form the bases of the linkages between past and present in Darfur and northern Sudanese dominated governments and must have contributed to the current events. Therefore I will start with the emergence of Darfur's first post-independence regional movement and its contribution to the assertion of a Darfurian identity different from that of the dominant northern Sudanese political entities including the NIF.

The Emergence of Darfur Regional Movement

The failure of the traditional political parties to govern and the continued regional disparity between central and riverine Sudan and the rest of the country which was poorer and underdeveloped resulted in two distinct processes: 1) Military coups (1958, 1969 and 1989) which often justified taking power from civilian democratically elected governments because of their inability to tackle major national issues – notably Sudan and livelihood questions. 2) The emergence during the 1960s of various regional movements such as the Beja Congress (BC) (*mutamar Al-Beja*), the General Union of the Nuba Mountains (GUNM) (*Itihad am jibal Al-Nuba*) and the Front for the Renaissance of Darfur (FRD) (*jabhat nahdat Darfur*). Invariably, the political educated elites who created the regional

13 See Aegis Report on the Relationship between the Fur tribe and the National Islamic Front, based on information provided by Darfur Centre for Human Rights and Development, 1993.

movements were dissatisfied with the dominance of Northern Sudanese ruling Sudan since independence and claiming to be of Arab origin, and with the slow pace of development in their region. A common complaint which the regional movements levied against the largest sectarian political parties (Umma Party and Democratic Unionist Party) was that they cared less about the people of the marginalized of provinces such as Darfur and more about their votes. Some members of the Darfurian elite opted for political autonomy and therefore decided to retreat from national to regional politics.

Nimirie's military socialist government banned all political parties, suspended the constitution and created a one-party state ruled by the Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU) until its demise in 1985. The Front for the Renaissance of Darfur was also banned along with other political organizations and became active only with the return of democracy when Nimirie was ousted and democracy was restored.

The Front for the Renaissance of Darfur (FRD) resumed its political activities and contested the 1986 elections with no success.¹⁴ Three reasons could explain this: 1) the Islamic orientation of Darfur graduates secured the NIF two geographical and four graduate seats, while the FRD did not win a single seat. 2) Because FRD ranks allied themselves with the sectarian parties to form a coalition government after the 1965 elections, many Darfurians opted for NIF whose ideology resonates with strong Islamic sentiments they had cultivated through the centuries. 3) The NIF cells in Khartoum University were dominated by students from Darfur, who following the introduction of regional government 1983 and under instructions from the leadership returned to Darfur and held prominent positions in the regional government. Amongst Darfur names with a

¹⁴ For more on the 1986 elections see Chiriyankandath 1987, pp. 96-102.

conspicuous presence in the National Islamic Front were people like the late Dawood Yahya Bolad, Faroug Mohamed Adam, Idris Abdulmawla and Abdul Jabar Adam, among others.¹⁵

In short, the National Islamic Front orchestrated military coup in 1989 had opened the door widely for many political educated elite members of - or with a political leaning towards - the NIF to form the backbone of Turabi's faction within the NIF. The ousting of many Darfurians from the National Congress Party after the friction between Turabi and Bashir illustrates their involvement in the NIF politics. In the last part of this paper I will elaborate on the implications of the dual loyalty of Darfur liberation movements: a) to their regional constituency and b) to northern Sudanese constructed national political entities and parties which obscures their resolve to reach a genuine peace agreement.

Tribal Militias: From National Defence Forces (NDF) to Janjaweed

I argue elsewhere, although the NIF regime has inherited the current civil war from its predecessors, a full-fledged militarization of Sudanese society began in earnest with the promulgation of the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) Law in 1989. This PDF law established a paramilitary force whose objectives are to train men and women in civil and military tasks, to raise their level of security consciousness, and instill military discipline so that they can cooperate with the regular armed forces and security services. The establishment of the PDF followed a practice initiated by the government of Sadig Al-Mahdi (1986-1989) who in 1986 established

¹⁵ Ironically, Dawood Boald's insurgency against the National Islamic Front in 1991, lead to his assassination by the Sudan Armed Forces allegedly under instructions from the leaders of the NIF. For more on this see Sharif Harir (1994).

militias to counteract the NIF militia and to serve in the war against the SPLA. Over the years these militias have been responsible for most atrocities committed against communities in southern Sudan.¹⁶

The PDF recruited officers among young professionals and students associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. According to the regime's propaganda, the PDF is waging *jihad* to halt Christian expansion in central Africa (EI-Affendi, 1993). The reconstruction of the concept of *jihad* in the NIF's narrative is illustrated by the so-called wedding of the martyr (*urs al shaheed*). Members of the PDF refuse to marry in the expectation of marrying in paradise; that is after they become martyrs. They reject marrying earthly women, *huur al-dunia* (dark-eyed virgins of the earth), in their eagerness to marry *huur al jinana* (dark-eyed virgins of paradise). Families are expected to treat the death of their loved ones in the *jihad* with jubilation, and should not mourn since death is *urs al shaheed* (the wedding of the martyr), which should be celebrated.

So great are the illusions of martyrdom that for the devout believers in the NIF message and particularly for those who have joined the war effort as PDF members, the primary aim is to defend their immediate families, land and livestock wealth. The stakes are high and the appeal is staggering.

It is of little surprise that the creation of PDF drastically altered the composition of the Sudanese military establishment. By 1996, the PDF vastly outnumbered the regular army, whose officer ranks were drastically depleted by repeated purges. According to reliable Sudan armed forces sources, by 1999 there were 80,000 regular troops in the Sudan armed forces, 3,500 NIF commissioned army officers and 150,000 PDF. Obviously, the PDFs were three times the size of the Sudan armed forces

¹⁶ See Mohamed Salih 1989 and 1995 and Mohamed Salih and Harir 1994.

and served as safeguard against any potential coups as well as assisting the Sudan government to fight the war on the cheap.

By the time the Darfur conflict developed into full-fledged insurgency, there was only a skeleton existence left for the Sudanese armed forces as the NIF government had ceded its monopoly over the use of force to tribal militias such as the Janjaweed who became part of PDF, the state-decreed paramilitary force.

An important observation to bear in mind is that the invocation of *jihad* by the NIF regime is not directed solely at the South, where Christianity was introduced during the colonial period and later became associated with southern resistance to northern domination. Neither is it solely directed at the SPLA which has made the abolition of *sharia* a precondition for peace negotiations. PDF forces have been active against suspected dissidents in northern Sudan, including regions where the majority of the population is Muslim but non-Arab, such as Darfur, Kordofan, the Nuba mountains, and the eastern region.

To that extent, the declaration of *jihad* has more to it than simply the invocation of an Islamic tradition. Its association with the NIF, whose followers are predominantly Arabic-speaking ethnic groups, means that Islam's distinct Arabic character has been superimposed on African societies in order to justify the oppression of what is perceived as the natural domain of Islamic indoctrination.

One area in which this kind of indoctrination has played a significant role is the NIF's position towards women. As in other Muslim Arab states, women's visibility in the public domain has become a political issue, a testament to the pervasive role of the state in the war of the sexes. In the

eyes of the NIF fundamentalists, the political meaning of women dressed in the Islamic style (not necessary veiled, but covering head and limbs) is the visibility of faith, an expression of a much deeper level of social control. For instance, in November 1991, the Khartoum governor issued an administrative decree which required women to wear Islamic dress in all state offices, public buildings and schools. Subsequently, the Civil Aviation Authority issued a rule banning female employees who did not wear Islamic dress from entering the airport building, because the NIF-dominated governor's council had announced that the airport represents the image of the Sudan to the outside world and that image should be Islamic. Schools were instructed that female students should wear Islamic dress. When the public ignored these rules, they were reintroduced in 1996 with an added emphasis on the serious consequences awaiting any person who fails to implement them. This time, the Khartoum governor's office decreed strict sexual segregation in public, in line with the NIF's puritanical vision of an Islamic society.

It was decreed by Parliament (22 October 1996) that men and women must not share the same seat on public transport, and men may not watch women playing sports. Sportswomen are prohibited from wearing sexually revealing clothes or clothes which expose the body. The decree reiterated a ban on co-education in schools. In higher education, men and women students must sit apart in class. At public gatherings, theatres, cinemas, etc., a curtain must separate the sexes, and on public marches they must walk separately. Furthermore, women may not sit next to a non-close male relative (literally stranger) driver on public transport or in private cars, and may not go shopping at night without the company of their husbands or close male relatives. Men must have good reason for walking along streets leading to girls schools or women's gathering places.

Not all Sudanese women wear Islamic dress through compulsion. Women members of the NIF known as Muslim Sisters and other religious orders wear it out of Sudanese tradition. However, because the NIF has issued administrative decrees forcing people to wear Islamic dress, resistance has increased among some women, particularly those in urban centres who do not share such devotion to Islamic tradition.¹⁷

Comparatively, it is understandable that rules such as segregation in buses and prohibition of co-education would arouse no resistance in Darfur which is too backward to have sufficient schools or running buses to attract the attention of passengers or parents to resist them. At hindsight, Darfurians are very religious and it is doubtful whether they would resist what many of them would perceive as the natural thing to do. However such ideological orientation could be a lethal instrument in war, which demands the demonization of the other and by doing so demand obedience.

I described the ideological orientation behind the emergence of tribal militias in order to offer the reader the opportunity to appreciate the highly charged ideological milieu in which tribal militias such as the Janjaweed emerged. By their nature, Janjaweed is a code name for the tribal militias created by NIF to operate in Darfur. They are largely recruited from Baggara nomadic groups who historically a) harboured animosity against the original populations of Darfur and b) controlled vast stretches of land for farming and grazing purposes.

Principally, tribal militias such as the Janjaweed are part of the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), a paramilitary force established by the Sudan Government and intended to act on behalf of the state when the Sudan

¹⁷ Mohamed Salih 1998, pp. 76-78 describes most of the events mentioned in this section.

Armed Forces or other security organs are unable to fulfil their function as part of the machinery of government. In a sense, the Sudanese state abdicated the monopoly over the use of power and coercion to a parallel paramilitary security organ that has officially become part of the machinery of government. In the circumstances, the distinction between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Janjaweed is somehow superfluous. Therefore, Janjaweed could be defined as:

“[A] generic term to describe Arab militias acting, under the authority, with the support, complicity or tolerance of the Sudanese State authorities, and who benefit from impunity for their actions”.¹⁸

However, although the gist of the definition is correct, the use of the term Arab militia simplifies the complex ethnic composition of the populations of Darfur in terms of Arabs and Africans. Some of the Janjaweed belong to ethnic groups that are originally African but through acculturation acquired an Arab identity or Arabic speaking. To reduce the Janjaweed zeal to fight on behalf of the NIF government on pure racial or religious grounds is erroneous. It is also erroneous to claim that there is a war of all against all based on racial grounds among Darfur ethnic groups that claim an Arab ancestry, and Muslim ethnic groups of African origin.

Darfur liberation movements¹⁹

The Darfur Liberation Front was initially established during the late 1980s as a response to the activities of the Sudan Government sponsored tribal militias in South Darfur, in 1989 re-named the Popular Defence Forces

¹⁸ Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary General, 25 January 2005, p. 33.

¹⁹ This section of the paper is based on a chapter submitted for publication in March 2005 entitled “Redeeming Islam: Religion and Conflict in the Sudan”. The paper deals with the fallout from the IGAD process and South-North Peace Agreement of 2005.

(PDF). It soon became an alliance of the ethnic groups which oppose the government-backed militias known for their notorious raids on settler farming communities, some of which had migrated from the northern part of Darfur as a response to recurrent droughts and famines. Based in and supported by Eritrea, Abdel Wahed Mohammed al-Nur, the leader of Darfur Liberation Front changed in 2003 its name to Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) with its political wing known as Sudan Liberation Movement (hence SLA/SLM).

The creation of SLA marked a formidable ideological shift from Darfur Liberation Front which was a secessionist movement premised on establishing a separate Darfur state, to a movement that aspires to create a democratic and more equitable Sudan. The SLA/SLM position on the unity of the Sudan is stated in its Political Declaration as follows:

The Sudan Liberation Movement/Army is of the view that Sudan's unity is of paramount importance, but it should not be maintained and cannot be viable unless it is based on justice and equality for all the Sudanese peoples. Sudan's unity must be anchored on a new basis that is predicated on full acknowledgement of Sudan's ethnic, cultural, social and political diversity. Viable unity must therefore ultimately be based on the right of self-determination and the free will of the various peoples of Sudan. The fundamental imperatives of a viable unity are an economy and political system that address the uneven development and marginalization that have plagued the country since independence, so that the interests of the marginalized majority are adequately catered for and they are brought to the same level of development of the ruling minority. The SLM/A shall work with all political forces that ascribe to this view.²⁰

However, clearly SLM/SLA reserves the right to self-determination if the current situation of uneven development is not addressed by the Sudan Government. The objective of SLM/SLA therefore is to create a united

²⁰ Political Declaration of SLA/SLM, March 14, 2003.

democratic Sudan on a new basis of equality, complete restructuring and devolution of power, even development, cultural and political pluralism and moral and material prosperity for all Sudanese. In a sense SLM/SLA affirms itself as a national movement that aims to address and solve the fundamental problems of the entire Sudan. This objective is similar to the Southern Movement as espoused by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA), which began its struggle for self-determination under the slogan of a united Sudan.

In common with SPLA/SPLM, SLA/SLM also prescribes to the principle of separation between religion and the state. Its position on religion is clearly pronounced as follows:

Religion is a source of spiritual and moral inspiration that serves the needs of our peoples and the entire humankind in their pursuit of peaceful interaction and greater moral and spiritual ascendancy. The state machinery belongs to all Sudanese regardless of their religious or spiritual values and its neutrality must be preserved. Religion and politics belong to two different domains and must be kept in their respective domain, with religion belonging to the personal domain and the state in the public domain, that is, religion belongs to the individual and the state belongs to all of us. In this way religion cannot become a cause of conflict among citizens of the same country.

The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the other major Darfur opposition group, has very different antecedence and objectives. By and large, JEM political orientation is spelled out in its manifesto for achieving peace in the Sudan. The second article of the JEM Protocol reads as follows:

1. "The Adoption of peaceful transition of power as a strategic option, meant to secure the stability and unity of the nation, and transparency and accountability in governance;
2. Assuring the establishment of national and regional criteria and modalities for the distribution of power and wealth which should positively reflect on the unity and diversity of the nation;
3. The implementation of a federal system of governance for all the six regions of the Sudan which shall allow for democratic self-governing by every region, within a united Sudan. Such regions are: the Central Region, the Northern Region, the Southern Region, the Eastern Region, Darfur and Kordofan Regions. The status the national capital (Khartoum) shall be considered as the 7th special region;
4. Participation by the regions in the central power, which shall be according to a national criterion based on the population of every region, as well as any other criteria to be agreed upon, provided that all the regions shall participate in governing the national capital and occupying the federal public positions in accordance with the population proportion for every region;
5. The restructuring of the armed forces in order to guarantee its national composition and orientation, and limit its role to the defence of the nation, provided that college and other enrolment for recruitment in the armed forces shall be in accordance with the population proportion for every region".²¹

Obviously, JEM shares with SLM/SLA the position that it does not struggle to create a separate Darfur state, but for a democratic united Sudan based on equity and justice. However, there are at least three main differences between JEM and SLM/SLA: First, while SLM/SLA is clear about the separation between religion and the state, JEM has no clear position on this issue. In fact there is no mention of the role of religion in general or Islam in particular in the future political make-up of the Sudan. JEM's close relationship with Hassan Al-Turabi's National Popular Congress (NPC) explains its position with regard to the role of Islam in politics. It is an open secret that disgruntled Turabi loyalists from Darfur created JEM when President Bashir expelled Turabi and his Islamist supporters from

²¹ Equality Movement (JEM) Peace Proposal for Sudan in General and Darfur of 8 February 2005.

government in late 1999. From this perspective, JEM could be seen as a front political organization used by Turabi loyalists to destabilise Bashir's regime.

Second, JEM has a clear political program as regards the future structure of government. In particular, it proposes a federal system of government, which is not different from the system proposed much earlier by the National Islamic Front (NIF). This also has strong affinity with its position on religion as both JEM and NIF adopt the federal solution because it allows a leeway for non-Muslim states such as South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains to opt out of the application of Islamic law, while the Muslim Arabic speaking or Afro-Arab dominated regions of the Sudan remain firmly under the Islamic law.

Third, in the new reconfiguration of post South-North peace agreement, JEM's position is tied up with that of Turabi and Turabi loyalists, a position well within the general aims of Sudan's divided Islamic movement. The Islamic faction opposes the Sudan Government due to internal differences in interpreting political Islam in the post-September 11 era. Prior to his expulsion from government, Turabi and his close loyalists formed the majority of *majlis al shura* (or Islamic Consultative Council), a parallel theocratic council constituted of diehard Islamists who directed the operations of the state by "remote control", even using its own special security branch.

In December 2004, a new Darfur liberation movement called National Movement for Reform and Development (NMRD) emerged. The timing of the emergence of this movement was not accidental. At the time when the Abuja peace negotiations between the Sudan Government and the two other rebel forces (SLA/SLM and JEM) stalled, NMRD offered its services

as an alternative. It began peace negotiations with the Sudan Government in a competing location at N'Damena, the capital of Chad, sponsored by Idris Deby, the President of Chad. NMRD leader, Nourane Manawi Bartcham claimed that his is a break-away movement from Turabi-influenced JEM. The speed with which the Sudan Government and NMRD wrapped up an agreement, including ceasefire, return of refugees to areas controlled (around Gineha, the largest town on the Sudan-Chad border) by NMRD, caught many observers by surprise. NMRD and JEM keep accusing each other of being stooges of the Sudan Government and Turabi respectively, illustrating that these two Darfur rebel movements are serving the rival camps of a divided NIF (the Turabi and Bashir/Taha factions).

Another member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and another Darfur opposition group is Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) led by Ahmed Draige, previously member of the Umma Party and Minister of State, and by Sharif Harir his Deputy. Sharif Harir has placed himself in the service of SLA/SLM negotiating team. This indicates that SFDA and SLA/SLM share a common platform aimed at creating a united democratic federal Sudan. To be sure, SFDA's charter (published in January 1994) known as A New Political Structure for the Sudan, purports that in the political sphere it aims:

To create a political order free from racism and religious intolerance, one which ensures individual freedom and promotes the common interests of all the Sudanese people, and to this end, to promote a democratic process that accommodates differing political views and basic freedoms based on clearly stated laws.

However, SFDA alliance also states that:

It should be understood that the SFDA is not a political party but an organization especially created to bring together all the Sudanese political and social forces – individuals and organizations – which believe in the principles and ideals expressed in this manifesto and are committed to the integral unity of the Sudan.

All Darfur liberation movements share SFDA's commitment to the unity of the Sudan. Some are even considered either break-aways from the NIF (JEM) or break-aways from other northern political parties (Draige, SFDA leader, was Umma Party Provincial Governor, and his Deputy Sharif Harir was formerly Muslim Brother and NIF member). The previous affiliations of Darfur opposition and liberation movement leadership with the NIF and other Northern Sudanese Political Parties, particularly the Umma Party of Sadiq Al-Mahdi, contributed to the slow pace of peace negotiations. Personal grievances apart, the living history of the Darfur elite charges the NIF and indeed the whole Northern Sudanese establishment as racist.²²

In short, Darfur liberation movements, like all regional movements, are marred with division and carry packages of old political enemies and loyalties (with the Umma Party and the Muslim Brotherhood and its successor the NIF) which will continue to weaken their bargaining position vis-à-vis the Northern dominated Sudanese state. Unfortunately, the objectives of their struggle are unclear and the relationship between constituencies and leadership rather blurred and further confused with the lack of decisiveness on the part of the educated political elite.

²² The writing of Sharif Harir amply express these sentiments, particularly his co-edited book *Sudan: Shortcut to Decay* and a two volume book without author, publisher and place of publication called the *Black Book of the Sudan* (in Arabic), reviewed by El Tom and Salih in Review of African Political Economy

An important aspect of the Darfur crisis is that it has weakened the NIF, which until recently considered Darfur to be one of its future electoral expansion regions, should it allow democracy to return to Sudan. The division of the NIF along ethnic lines brings home to its leaders the realization that it has lost its universal appeal which claims that its members belong to a Muslim umma or community which is above race, nationality and colour. The fact that the intellectual brass of the NIF accused Turabi of fomenting ethnic divisions within the organization because of his leaning towards the Darfur elite such as Ali Al-Haj, also illustrates that the NIF leadership is aware of this ethnic division. For instance, at the constitutional conference of the ruling National Congress Party, non-Darfur members of the party ganged against a Darfur member, an act which prompted other Darfur members to form a bloc within the conference in order to support Darfurians' candidacy to political offices.

In the same vein, it is not clear yet whether the Islamists' engineered conflict in Darfur has benefited the Umma Party or swayed its people to support the political amateurism of its loosely connected liberation movements. Invariably, the movements are tanned with more than a veneer of Islamism due to past allegiances of some its vocal and well-known leaders within the NIF political establishment. An added complexity is the historical association between the Baggara and the Umma Party and how this could play out in a democratic Sudan. Obviously these complexities may explain part of the riddle why managing the Darfur crisis is so difficult despite genuine efforts by both internal and external actors.

Resource Conflicts or Ethnic Cleansing

Resource conflicts are not strange to land-based subsistence societies in Sudan or elsewhere in the developing world. Historically, Darfur region has its share of resource conflicts which to some extent shaped its present state of affairs and probably its future destiny, including the mingling of resource conflicts and ethnic cleansing. The question where resource conflicts end and ethnic cleansing begins is an important one because it will determine to what extent the Sudan Government or the liberation movements are responsible for transforming resource conflicts into a modern warfare for political gains.

Claims about resource conflicts have to be substantiated. The harsh geographic conditions characteristic of at least two thirds of Darfur land mass of 196,555 km² (75,890 miles²) inhabited by over six million peoples, might challenge this view. However, claims of scarcity could be explained against land concentration patterns, the prevalence of the concept of *dar* (such as dar Fur literally meaning the homeland of the Fur), with its long political history of sultanates and dynasties which ruled it. O'Fahey's seminal work which came out in a book entitled *Land in Darfur*, provides the most detailed recording of land history ever attempted in Darfur.²³ Historical studies of land tenure systems such as those documented by O'Fahey provide the necessary historical depth that should deter politicians and policy makers from hastily making decisions based on informed guessing. Second, it explains the complexity of ethnic relations and the danger of making simplistic statements such as sharp distinctions between African lands and Arab invaders symptomatic of most current explanations of the Darfur conflict.

²³ O'Fahey's 1983

Administratively Darfur is divided into three states: South Darfur with its capital in Nyala; North Darfur with its capital in Al-Fashir and West Darfur with its capital in Genina close to the Sudanese-Chadian border. These divisions do not correspond to clear ethnic divisions because first *diar* (singular *dar* or homeland) are loosely demarcated; second, due to the desert conditions which prevail in North Darfur coupled with recurrent drought and famines since the 1970s, people migrate to fertile agricultural and grazing lands. Even without drought season movements of nomadic groups in response to variations in waterfall and availability of grazing lands population mobility is so common that it is the rule rather than the exception.²⁴

In a widely circulated memo written by Professor Fouad Ibrahim,²⁵ a renowned veteran academic and researcher on development and physical geography of Darfur, he laments:

It is often said that the cause of the war in Darfur is the conflict between pastoralists and farmers over limited natural resources: water, agricultural land and pasture. No doubt, conflicts have always existed over these resources. But they are not the true cause of the current brutal war. In fact, the natural resources of Darfur are not meagre at all.

Professor Ibrahim proceeds to provide four data sets on water resources, groundwater, farming potential and grazing potential to substantiate his claim that the problem is not resource scarcity but central government neglect of Darfur region. He also shows that the livestock wealth of Northern Darfur is estimated at two billion US Dollars with an annual productive estimate of half a billion US Dollars. Although the people of

²⁴ See Sharif Harir, 2004; Fouad Ibrahim 1998; Mohamed Suliman 1992.

²⁵ The memo entitled "Ideas on the Background to the Present Conflict in Darfur", University of Bayreuth, Germany, May 2004.

Darfur and Northern Darfur in particular are poor, their region is not. By and large, Professor Ibrahim concludes that the problem is not resource scarcity, it is a problem of underdevelopment that has inflicted the region. Therefore, the current peace efforts will be futile without putting in place long-term policies to tackle this problem. In a sense, Darfur rebel groups' demand for power and wealth sharing could also be understood as a direct plea for developing the region in order to be able to utilize its development potential.

At least three conclusions could be made: first, resource conflicts in Darfur are propelled by absolute scarcity, but they are primarily a result of specific land use patterns (migratory pastoralism and agro-pastoralism) which have not been sufficiently developed to cope with human and animal population growth.²⁶ Therefore the current land use patterns and subsistence activities require both mobility and ethnic geographical overlap which can no longer be resolved by reference to the *dar* (homeland) concept.

Second, the modest social and economic developments, including health, education, trade, modern transport and communication etc. which have taken place in Darfur since the colonial legacy, have also produced new patterns of population mobility, not only for natural resources, but also for employment and new career patterns. In the circumstances, the complete disengagement of the so-called dichotomy between the Arab and African population is almost impossible, and could be implemented only if measures harsher than the current genocidal policy are pursued.

Third, the history of land in Darfur as O'Fahey and others have warned is too complex to contemplate secession as a solution to ethnic cleansing or

²⁶ The population of Darfur has grown from just over two million in 1984 to over six million in 2005. Such numbers also show the pressure exerted on the resources when agricultural technology is still backwards and traditional tools and equipments are used.

genocide. It is at that point that the mix between conventionally common resource conflicts and politically motivated displacement of civilian population has aggravated the situation and made it lean more towards land alienation which in the current circumstances could be conflated with “ethnic cleansing”.

Conclusions: Managing the Darfur Crisis

The beginning of the current crisis in Darfur coincided with the signing of several peace agreements between the Sudan Government and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLA/SPLM).²⁷ Although the peace agreements are cheered by many well-wishers, their terms have begun to unravel concerns similar to those which contributed to the war in South Sudan. From the perspective of the Darfur liberation fronts and other political entities which feel excluded, three kinds of reaction can be observed:

1. Viewed by those who fought the war on the side of SPLA/SPLM as a rebuff of their struggle which was espoused to determine a better future for the whole Sudan. They foresee no real gains from the shackles of “old Sudan”. Although they have not rejected the peace agreement, they feel forced to create conditions that will make it difficult for the North and South to implement it without due recognition of their plight as part of the marginalized Sudan. That is especially the case for the Darfur liberation movements. Naturally they link the peace agreements and the Darfur crisis as they in engaging the Sudan Government are using SPLA/SPLM methods to obtain similar gains, political autonomy, power and wealth sharing.
2. Based on an inherent flawed assumption that the war is a South-North affair. This assumption has long been overtaken by events. The war is no longer South-North, but South-North-East and West

²⁷ For more on the relationship between and potential repercussions of the South-North agreement and the Darfur crisis see Mohamed Salih's article entitled “The Reward of Peace is War” (2004).

and has engulfed all regions of the country without exception. Solving what is perceived as a North-South problem has left the problems of other regions simmering, only to explode when they realize that they are potentially losers in an alliance between Sudan Government and the SPLA/SPLM or North and South, respectively.

3. Not inclusive, even within a divided South and a divided North. While some armed groups in the South foresee the peace agreements as an opportunity to succeed and establish an independent state, others argue that it is for a better deal in a future democratic Sudan. In the North, the division is not so much about the agreement, but about who should represent the North: A democratically elected government or the NIF government which ousted a democratically elected government through staging a military coup.

By implication, the Darfur crisis offers the grim prospect that other disgruntled marginalized regions of the Sudan would consider the use of arms as the only available instrument available to them in order to pressurize the Sudan Government to respond to their grievances. For example, on January 2005, the Beja Congress staged an all out strike in Port Sudan, the capital of the Red Sea state demanding wealth and power sharing. The Beja Congress and its military arm are still fighting the Sudan Armed Forces in the eastern flank of the war-zone around the boarder with Eritrea. It is expected that the solution to the crisis in Darfur will also be a cursor pointing out the direction as to the need for an inclusive peace process instead of peace meal solutions.

The land question, which I alluded to in an earlier section of this paper, is more complex than analysts and policy makers would have hoped. The history of land ownership cannot be treated as a straightforward matter of African land seized by Arabs, of course apart from the latest land seizures connected with the current conflict. It has a long history of land allocations by Darfur sultans to Arab and non-Arab settlers.

The current peace efforts are centred on what I call the humanitarian intervention toolkit: humanitarian assistance for refugees and displaced people,²⁸ peace keeping missions,²⁹ responsibility to protect, including war crime charges³⁰ and peace conferences to solve the crisis by peaceful means.³¹ All these commendable efforts, regardless of mishaps and how much more should/could have been done, could be described as short-term survival strategies meant to contain the situation.

The solution to the Darfur crisis is possible only when the Sudanese governing elite recognize that Sudan can no longer be governed by a central government located in Khartoum. Conversely, “Khartoum” political rewards are also too meagre to accommodate the aspirations of increasingly politically vocal leaders of the regional movements or populace of the marginalized regions. The fact that the Darfur elite is not fighting for independence from Sudan illustrates that past fears of secession are tampered by the harsh reality that these regions are too poor to stand on their own even if oil is discovered and development and humanitarian assistance are secured. Even if they seceded, their remoteness, poor infrastructure and meagre natural resources often subjected to prolonged droughts and famine do not make for a promising start.

²⁸ A massive humanitarian assistance operation has ensured feeding of an unspecified number of people ranging between 680,000 and two million by some estimates.

²⁹ Entrusted to the African Union whose mission financed by the EU consists of 120 observers and a protection force of 270 military personnel.

³⁰ Reference here is made to the Security Council Resolution 1593 (2005), which refers Sudan to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

³¹ See Africa Confidential 2004; Slim 2004; Paul 2005; Africa Research Bulletin, April 2003a, May 2003b, and October 2003c; also 2004 for various contributions to these peace efforts, particularly the Abuja and Ndjemina rounds of talks and subsequent agreements between Sudan Government and Darfur liberation movements.

A neo-realism based on the harsh realities of the Darfur region and the need for deconstructing the Sudanese state with more accommodation for different identities and autonomous federal states would be the only solution to quench a power-thirsty emergent regional political elite. It is hard to see how such a vision could be entertained with the elite's divided loyalty still prevailing, remotely influenced by the northern dominated political entities – sectarian political parties and the NIF.

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