Neither nomads versus settlers nor ethnic conflicts – The long history of changing alliances and politicized groups on the Chad/Sudan border

Andrea Behrends[1]

Abstract

The border region between Chad and Sudan affects and is affected by a wide international field, from neighboring Sudan and Libya, to Egypt, France, and the United States. As of March 2007, the war in Sudan's western Darfur region on the border with Chad has been raging for more than four years with over 200,000 Sudanese citizens living in Chadian refugee camps and more than two million displaced in Darfur. This article discusses the often proclaimed notion of the conflict being rooted either in recurrent disputes between nomads and settlers or in ethnic racism between so-called 'Arabs' and 'Black Africans'. Instead of following these notions, a historical pattern of allying and re-allying border groups is brought forward. This pattern will be shown to have been instrumentalized by different actors, aggravating the conflict and causing yet unprecedented forms of 'tribal hatred' in the region. The paper begins by giving an account of different voices concerning the relations between nomads and settlers in Darfur and the wider border region. It will, then, attempt to disentangle the complex historical connections as well as the intertwined relations between the present governments of Chad, Sudan, and others, in order to develop a frame for understanding the actors' perspectives in recent violent developments in the border region. The second part will focus on the local border groups mired in a cycle of violence that keeps returning the forefront of the regional conflict.

Introduction

The current Darfur conflict, which by now has caused further instability expanding into the larger region, has most recently regained center stage in early 2006, after it had first been reported in the world press throughout much of 2004. Since then, the media has continued to cover the conflict and the current debate over sending UN troops to Darfur and about the worsening security situation in Chad, making it clear that things are still deteriorating at rapid speed. Actually, fighting has spread over into Chad, aggravating both the frequency of attacks and the destitution of over 200,000 refugees in Chad and more than 2.7 million internally displaced people in Sudan. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) was tabled in late April 2006 by African Union mediators in Abuja and signed on May 5, 2006 by the government of Sudan and one faction of one of the rebel groups (see below). However, alliances between rebel groups are still continuously changing, causing the situation to deteriorate with splinter rebel groups breaking away from the control of larger units and banditry taking hold of the region.

The reasons for the Darfur conflict have been widely discussed. There have been different strands of explanation. In Sudan, the statement given most often in government circles and pro-government newspapers is that of persistent land and water conflicts between nomads and settlers, both living in the area for hundreds of years. Political reasons are left out in this discourse, and other reasons for increasing tensions, like droughts and desert expansion, have been persistently denied by government agents, so that now they cannot be declared as major causes for the present violence. International academia and informed journalism, on the other hand, mainly take up the Darfurian rebels' own perspective, which focuses on the Sudanese government's longstanding neglect of the region, its denial to include peripheral areas like Darfur or eastern Sudan into the power and wealth-sharing arrangements (negotiated for in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the country's southern provinces, signed in January 2005), and its continuous use of militia groups as armed and violent opposition against Sudanese populations perceived as political enemies to the government. Concerning the often quoted 'Arab vs. African' explanation for the conflict in Darfur, the most ambiguous character of these crude distinctions of racial origin has also been extensively commented upon. It has repeatedly been highlighted that this region's entire population has been Muslim for a long time. Thus, because the 'Muslim-Christian-divide' – attributed in a similarly unconvincing way for the north-south-conflict – did not suit this case, and since ethnic divisions did not hold for much explication either, a racial explanation seemed to make most sense to the media representing the conflict.

A more critical analysis of the conflict's origins, however, would emphasize the argument that regional alliances and rivalries have often changed, and that, at least in the past, they rarely divided along 'racial' or strictly ethnic lines. In point of

fact, intermarriage and economic interdependence between nomadic and sedentary people has historically resulted in cultural assimilations to the point of adopting new identities (Abdul-Jalil 1984, Babiker 2006: 44). Thus, this process of 'becoming' Zaghawa, Fur, Masalit or Arab helped to neutralize the underlying potential for ethnic conflict and violence. The question why certain groups in Darfur – who all have in similar ways been neglected by colonial and governmental planning and political decision making over the past hundred years – tend to ally with the present government while others chose to rebel against it and look for allies elsewhere has to be linked to socio-political development in the larger region and to governmental policies since independence.
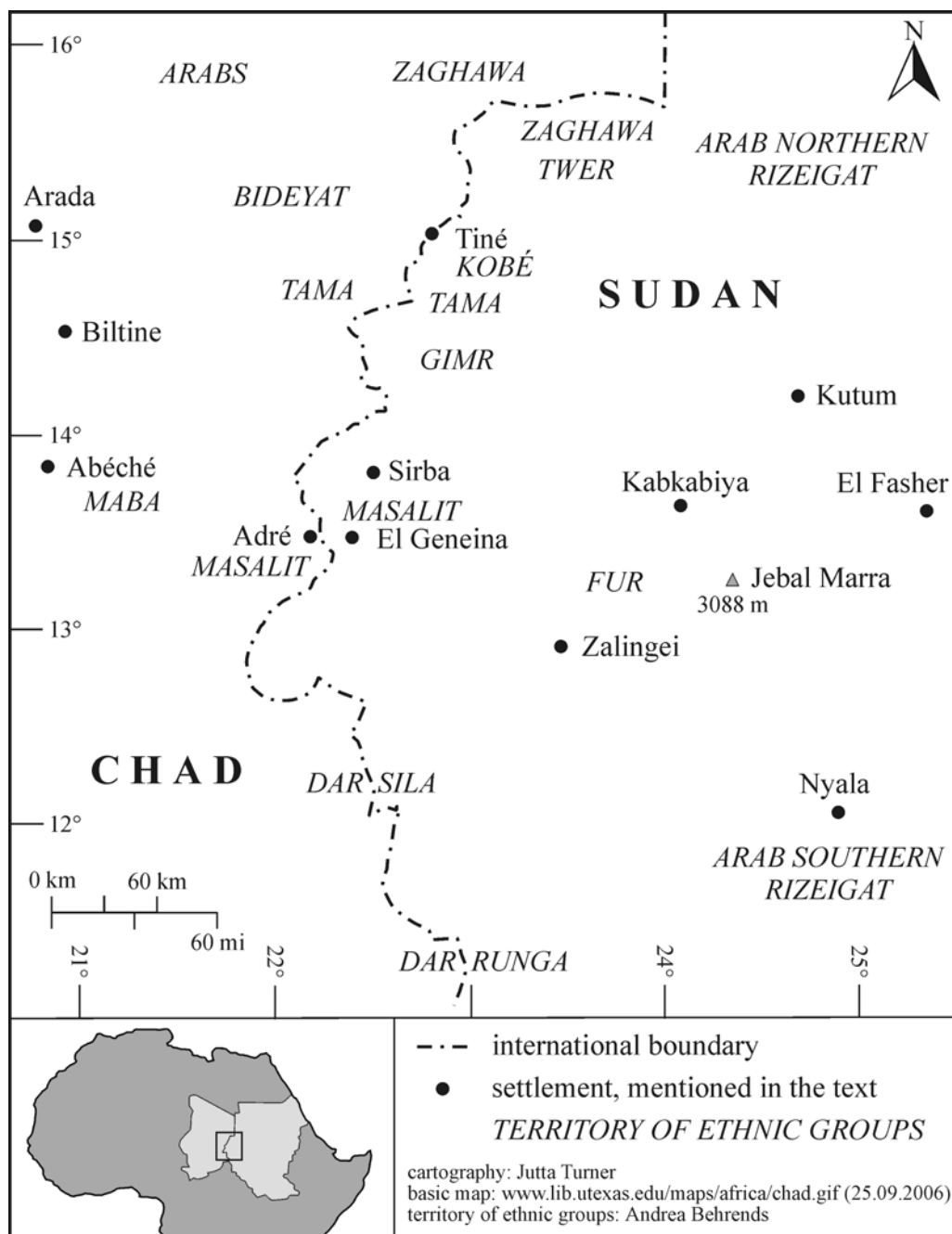
With a first focus on differing opinions regarding the relations between nomads and settlers in the Chad/Sudan border region, this article begins with a discussion of the relevant recent Sudanese literature concerning this issue. To illustrate the 'changing alliances' approach (cf. Schlee 2004) mentioned in this article, a historical perspective on the processes that link (and separate) the neighboring regions of Wadai and Darfur[2] will then be brought forward. The historical positions of the two once powerful sultanates – and of the smaller sultanates and kingdoms between them – are presented in order to show patterns of local alliance building and how activities of forming and breaking alliances are intensified with external involvement. Furthermore, these historical developments will be compared to subsequent changes in this region instigated by the regimes of Chad, Sudan and Libya as well as international politics. The focus will then turn to the region of the present conflict itself, to the various actors that evolved out of or influenced events of war and reconciliation. Although there is, most certainly, no clear-cut 'group membership', the categorizations serve to clarify how people have come to identify themselves and others along certain lines – like the now prominent 'African vs. Arab' or 'nomads vs. settlers' explanations for the Darfur conflict – as opposed to others. The critical point to be made is that the radius of action for people in Darfur and on the other side of the border in Wadai and Biltine has emerged out of a long and intertwined history, and the changing nature of the neighboring regimes – including far-reaching cross-border movements, political resistance and alliances, support of and counter-insurgencies against international involvement, or natural disasters – further intensifies and aggravates the situation. To conclude, I will discuss how contemporary agency of individuals or groups relates to the historical and socio-political frames in the border region. The point

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2 The spelling of the names of these regions has altered over time according to the political landscape and to the language used. Thus Wadai is normally spelled Ouaddaï in French texts, particularly when referring to the times of the sultanate from the sixteenth century up to 1912. Darfur is spelled as Dar Fur when referring to the sultanate that existed from the sixteenth century until 1916 (with an interruption from 1874–1898). In order not to add confusion to the complicated processes outlined here, I will not change spelling for Darfur and Wadai during this text, and stick to those forms most often used in English.

will be made that although historical and current situations of conflict and war share structural similarities, they differ substantially in their causes and dynamics.

Brief insertion on the relations between nomads and settlers in the border region

In the Chad-Sudan border area, there is a tendency to attribute the origins of the current conflict as well as most previous conflicts to tensions between nomads and settlers. This view needs critical assessment. As mentioned above, much of the rest of this paper will focus on another argument, namely that this particular region has been characterized by the shifting alliances between many different groups as the result of conflicts and external interventions. By focusing on changing alliances, however, relations between nomads and settlers – and their inherent potential for conflict – are somewhat marginalized. This part of the paper will try to make up for that shortcoming, and provide a brief review of opinions on this particular relationship and its connection to present and past conflicts in the border region. To be sure, essentializing perceptions of these two groups as standing in 'age-old' conflict with each other can well be relegated to those unconvincing voices that explain the Darfur conflict as one originating in localized problems without regard for any external involvement (from, for instance, the government's side). More interesting in the present context are the voices of concerned Sudanese scientists, recently brought together in a volume published by Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed and Leif Manger (2006) as well as earlier studies on this issue. To begin, what follows is a brief introduction (based on Lidwien Kapteijns' seminal work on *Mahdist faith and Sudanic tradition* in the Masalit sultanate (Kapteijns 1985: 15ff.)) on the border region and the people straddling the border to help clarify further considerations on the topic.

Map legend:
- – · – international boundary
- ● settlement, mentioned in the text
- *TERRITORY OF ETHNIC GROUPS*

cartography: Jutta Turner
basic map: www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/chad.gif (25.09.2006)
territory of ethnic groups: Andrea Behrends

The border between Chad and Sudan stretches 1,360 km. The diverse peoples living in this area trace their history back to chiefdoms and smaller sultanates that existed long before the present day nation-states came into being. They are mainly sedentary groups, although over time some took up semi-nomadic liveli-

hoods. All of the groups, earlier incorporated in changing constellations within the Darfur and Wadai empires, still exist today and designate the area that they occupy as their official homeland, or *dar* (Arabic), even though this designation might not conform to administrative borders. Among those communities along the northern border area are the Bideyat and Zaghawa, who share a common language and unite a number of smaller, clan-based communities under their name.[3] Dar Zaghawa ('the homeland of the Zaghawa') covers parts of the border area in Biltine, Chad, and northern Darfur in Sudan. Dar Qimr[4] lies further to the southeast of Dar Zaghawa and, although incorporated into the former Darfur sultanate early on, managed to remain a sultanate with its historical customs and titles. Dar Tama was a mountainous kingdom southwest of Dar Zaghawa that was once a tributary of Darfur until it was conquered by Wadai in the early nineteenth century, but which, due to its geography, always retained a high degree of independence and made it a strong ally for other groups – who united against the French, for example, during their conquest of the region.[5] Furthermore, the region of Dar Jabal, to the south of Dar Qimr, was once governed as a district of Darfur's western province.

The sultanate of Dar Masalit, situated centrally among the others, came into being with the rise of Mahdism[6] during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The sultans of Dar Masalit always balanced their alliances with historical Wadai and Darfur, shifting their political weight from one side to the other. Today, Masalit live on both sides of the border, but the larger number as well as the seat of the Masalit sultan remains in Sudan. Between Dar Jabal and Dar Masalit, a number of diverse peoples live together in an area called Dar Erenga, most of whom have probably migrated from Wadai and Dar Tama; they are Awra, Asungor, Mararit, Girga, Dula, Erenga, etc., with each group being ruled by a chief or sultan who historically was part of the administrative hierarchy of western Darfur. Straddling the southern border lays Dar Sila, which was once a full-fledged frontier state during the nineteenth century. It maintained its position of semi-independence from the former Wadai and Darfur empires, but paid tribute to both. Dar Sinyar,

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[3] The Zaghawa are divided by different families and sultanates in the two countries, which results in mutual competition over posts and power while at the same time providing fertile ground for alliances and oppositions within the group. While the Chadian president Déby originates from the Chadian Zaghawa Bideyat, the Zaghawa Kobe who straddle the border and the Zaghawa Twer, living mainly in Sudan, partly side with and partly oppose Déby. Today, it is mainly the Kobe and Twer who take part in the Darfur rebellion within the different movements referred to below (Marchal 2004: 53, for further reference on the Zaghawa see the seminal work by the Tubianas 1977).

[4] *Qimr* is also sometimes transcribed as *Gimr* or *Gimir*.

[5] The Tama, as will be made more explicit below, also play a prominent part in the recent upcoming of Chadian rebel groups against President Déby.

[6] See footnote 19.

the other southern kingdom, was part of Darfur until Dar Sila annexed it in the late nineteenth century. Even in former times, the territories of these different *dur* (pl. of *dar*) were never clear-cut, nor were their populations ethnically separated. Different groups spoke and still speak distinct languages – apart from Arabic – and maintain their own cultural traits, although individual switching between occupational as well as linguistic groups has always occurred (Abdul-Jalil 1984, Babiker 2006: 48). The further southward one moves along the border however, the more one encounters the "violent face" (Flint/de Waal 2005: 10) of the region; in former times, Dar Fongoro and Dar Runga constituted the slaving grounds of Darfur for domestic purposes and for export to Egypt and beyond (ibid.).

The history of the originally nomadic Arab populations in Darfur and Wadai has different phases, spanning from the distant past until rather recent immigrations. The first Arabs to arrive between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries – including the Ziyadiya, Ta'aisha, Habbaniya and Rizeigat – originated most probably from Bedouin groups that poured into the larger region from Arabia across the Sinai Peninsula in the northeast.[7] Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, subsequent migrant groups from West Africa aggregated in part with earlier Arab migrants to form the cattle herding *baggara* population of southern Darfur.[8] The *baggara* were separated from the camel herding Bedouin (*abbala*) nomads by the Jebel Marra massive and the sedentary groups clustered there. The *abbala* nomads moved into the northern part of Darfur and Wadai to live alongside the northern camel herding and semi-nomadic non-Arab groups such as the Zaghawa, Berti and Meidob. The Fur sultans distributed land[9] to the arriving Arab groups in different configurations. In the sparsely settled south of Jebel Marra, they distributed large parcels of land to Arabs from the four main *baggara* groups – the Ta'aisha, Beni Halba, Habbaniya and Rizeigat. Whereas in contrast to that, the northern Arab groups – the Rizeigat sections of the Mahariya, Mahamid, Eteifat and Ereigat – never received more than small estates and for limited periods of time.[10]

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[7] This migration of Arabs from the east should not be confused with the first introduction of Islam to the region, which also happened during that period. Islamic influences and, in the end, conversion came from West Africa with traveling Muslim teachers and pilgrims to Mecca. Darfur, thus, was the first Islamic stronghold in what is Sudan today (Cunnison 1972: 105, Yusuf Fadl Hassan 1973, Macmichael 1967, O'Fahey/Spaulding 1974).

[8] See Braukämper (1992) for population movements forming the *baggara* group in that region.

[9] The system of granting land to foreigners was called *hakura*. Titles to *hakura* land never turned into land ownership, but the chieftaincy that developed around *hakura* often became hereditary and the tribe of the *hakura* chief became the dominant group (Flint/de Waal 2005: 8).

[10] This fact, to a number of observers, greatly contributed to their later willingness to take part in the current escalation of the conflict in combination with the proliferation of firearms, the im-

If, in relation to sedentary and nomadic groups, we now take a closer look at the different explanations for the origins of conflict in the border region, we find two overriding propositions: the first concerns the quest of landless groups like the *abbala* Arabs for their own territory; the second, particularly after the droughts of the 1980s, concerns increasing land scarcity, mounting national and international interventions, and the aligning of different political regimes with groups within Darfur and Wadai in an effort to manipulate historical tensions between those groups. There has been no knowledgeable explanation that ascribes the reasons for the dramatic intensification of the recent conflict in this border region to ethnic or occupational factors alone. To the contrary, both the ethnic and the occupational structure of the region have been described as highly fluid and adjustable to the situation.

As an example of how ethnic identifications vary, Abdul-Jalil (1984), in his study of the village area of Dor in northern Darfur, observed that the Zaghawa sub-clans of the Dar Tuar would support each other if and when one of them was involved in a conflict with the Zaghawa sub group of the Kobé, and yet both sides would unite under the larger 'Zaghawa' umbrella in the face of external threats (ibid.: 69). On the other hand, he showed that marriages in Dor regularly crossed ethnic lines; and in the marketplace, descent, territory, and occupation mattered less than the language spoken with or by the trader. When using wells to water animals, or dealing with the district tax collector, what counted most was the community and neighborhood where one lived. Similarly, the occupational identification could change if a sedentary Fur accumulated animals, for he might then chose to call himself 'Zaghawa' or 'Arab', in line with his livelihood (Flint/de Waal 2005: 5). In the case of conflict, as Abdul-Jalil also indicated, ethnic lines tended to tighten again, a fact also observed by Klute about the Tuareg nomads of Niger and Mali (Klute 1996: 61).

De Waal (2004a) and Abdul-Jalil (1984, 2006) seem to agree that land is the factor causing most tensions between nomadic and sedentary groups in the Chad-Sudan border region. The same result is given by Mohamed Suliman (1992) and Adam Azzain Mohamed (2002), who endeavored to list all inter-group conflicts in Darfur between 1968 and 1998. Given the fact that some of these conflicts happened also between sedentary groups or even within the same group over, for example, leadership positions, most of the minor and short term tensions developed over the question of land use rights and access to water and other natural resources. These tensions are fuelled by the prominent belief among nomadic groups that all land belongs to Allah and therefore no single group has the right to claim a territory outright. However, this opinion also holds possibilities for peaceful usage and exchange, which was made most explicit in a drawing given to de Waal in

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pact of ecological crisis, and involuntary population movements (Abdul-Jalil 2006: 30, Babiker 2006: 44, Flint/de Waal 2005: 9).

1985 by an old Arab sheikh, showing a chessboard pattern of fields and pastures, some belonging to the sedentary farmers and some to the nomadic herders (de Waal 2004a[11]). Here, both groups gain from the other's presence. Although this economic perspective might sound convincing, the close political correlation of land ownership and administrative rights proves to be a hindering factor to such seemingly well-functioning cooperation.[12]

In Mohamed's (2002) account of inter-group conflicts and customary mediation in Darfur, nomadic claims to land do not hinge on religious beliefs, but rather to the authority over land held by the state. In this highly controversial debate, sedentary groups claim autochthony and therefore ownership of all land in their *dar*, as opposed to (former) nomads, who maintain that unregistered land is owned by the state and can therefore be allocated to those who need or make use of it. During the 1980s, after the Sudanese government had passed the 1970 'Unregistered Land Act',[13] several landless groups in Darfur started claiming land, and with that, political seats in the regional administration (see Harir 1994 and Al-Battahani 2006 for a quest by the Arab Alliance in the 1980s). After 1985, under the presidency of Sadiq al-Mahdi, whose followers in Darfur mainly came from the Arab population, this quest reinforced a backing of Arab interests by the national government. In Babiker's reasoning, local wars, which were originally fought over resources and land, started to be transformed by what he calls "local 'legitimation crises', brought about by the re-organisation of the Native Administration[14] and the creation of the so-called emirates for tribal groups that until recently had been under the political authority of the Fur" (2006: 48ff.).

It would not be correct, however, in regard to local conflicts to create the impression that only the Arab groups in the larger border region have found a strong partner in the central government. In another way of grouping, northern camel herding Arabs and Zaghawa have stood in opposition to the Fur and Masalit (and other sedentary cultivators living in the central parts of Darfur), regarding the northern groups' tendency to resort to the central governments of Chad and Sudan for political or military support as a way to legitimize their needs. In a re-

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[11] This and other texts by Alex de Waal on Darfur are accessible at http://conconflicts.ssrc.org/-hornofafrica/dewaal/.

[12] This perception has been extensively asserted in a good number of studies on autochthony and land conflicts. For a recent edition and overview see, for instance, Kuba and Lentz (eds.) (2006).

[13] "Before 1970 all other land (unregistered) belonged to the state, which held ownership in trust for the people, who had customary rights to it. In 1970 the Unregistered Land Act declared that all waste, forest, and unregistered lands were government land. Before the act's passage, the government had avoided interfering with individual customary rights to unregistered land, and in the late 1980s it again adhered to this policy." (http://www.photius.com/countries/sudan/-economy/sudan_economy_land_tenure.html)

[14] See below under the sub-heading *Colonial times and beyond: different conditions for the independent states.*

gional comparison, the Zaghawa today stand out in their efforts in international networking and central political involvement in both countries – in Chad, because of their ethnic and familial relations to the president who rules through nepotism, and in Sudan, due to the Zaghawa's backing by the present regime, which facilitates their access to political positions. This has resulted in the Zaghawa's support of pro-fundamentalist politics in the Sudan. The Fur, Masalit, Berti and others, who do not have these relations in the political arena, have taken a slower route through higher education, and consequently are still visibly underrepresented in political offices (Marchal 2004: 50). Thus, on the central political level, the sedentary Fur people are underrepresented but at the same time maintain their posture of supremacy concerning land and political positions in their region of origin, whereas the semi-nomadic Zaghawa have achieved a certain central political presence while being deprived locally of their land. And so, to conclude this interjection on the relations between nomads and settlers in the Chad / Sudan border region, it is the political backing of some groups as opposed to others by the central government rather than the nomad-settlers opposition, which is prone to produce inter-group conflict.

The historical Chad/Sudan border region as a field shaped by external influences

Today's frontier between Chad and Sudan existed long before the 1921 delimitation of national borders between the French who had conquered Wadai in 1909, and the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the colonial power in the Sudan from 1898 to 1956. Up until that point, however, it was never clear-cut or static in any way. All historical accounts explicitly mention the border region's history as one of continuing conflict both on a smaller and larger scale (Nachtigal 1971, Carbou 1912, Slatin 1997); integration occurred mainly through mutual imitation of hierarchical and military structures built upon Sudanic tradition and during brief and changing alliances in the face of a common enemy. The following will demonstrate how external influences shaped this region into the borderland, still afflicted by tensions and open conflict that it is today.

The sultanates of Wadai and Darfur were similar in strength and size[15] and, for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they fought each other over allegiance, land, slaves or control of trade routes. Invasions into each other's terri-

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[15] Kapteijns (1985: 13) dates the separation of the larger pre-Islamic Tunjur state, which comprised both Wadai and Darfur to some time briefly after the rise of the Keira dynasty in Darfur, between 1600 and 1650. In this time, the overarching power of the Keira sultans was overthrown in the west by the Maba who became the ethnic core of the sultanate of Wadai. Both sultanates were Islamized as a result of the important role which the sultans and the central political institutions played in spreading Islam (see also Meier 1995: 32).

tory were the rule until the late nineteenth century. Until the Turco-Egyptian invasion of Darfur in 1874, the people living between Wadai and Darfur had no choice but to side with one of these two most influential regional powers. But siding with either one did not represent a permanent choice; loyalty was always contested whenever one of the two powers was weakened. Shifts in alliances were most often brought about if a faction of a group was dissatisfied with or competed against their leaders. In this situation the splinter group could be most successful if it looked for support from the enemies of their leaders. Thus the key point is not that alliances and oppositions frequently changed in a setting marked by imminent rivalry, but rather that an historical view on the region reveals the most striking parallel between the present Darfur conflict and the historical development of the area: that the continually changing decision to ally or oppose regional or supra-regional powers becomes particularly evident in times of social ruptures brought about, for instance, by the death of powerful rulers or by strong external interferences.

Impositions of foreign rule: Turco-Egyptian, Mahdist, Anglo-Egyptian and French (re-)conquests

Foreign rule was imposed on Darfur in 1874 by the Turco-Egyptian Empire. Some thirty years later, in 1906, Wadai was invaded by French colonial troops. As the following will show, however, the events starting with the Turco-Egyptian conquest of the area were of central concern to the socio-political balance of the greater region.

In the late eighteenth century, Darfur was at the peak of its power, holding its tributary kingdoms on the western fringes as well as expanding further east into Kordofan.[16] By 1821 the Turco-Egyptian Empire had established rule over the Nile Valley and re-conquered Kordofan, forcing the sultan of Darfur to retreat to his former territories. By then what is known today as the Sudan had no political existence whatsoever. With the exception of the powerful sultanates of Sennar to the east and Darfur to the west, the area south of Khartoum was stateless and only of limited interest to the Turco-Egyptian rulers. From the 1850s onwards, trade companies with slave armies well equipped with modern firearms started far reaching raids for slaves and ivory from Khartoum into the south. The Turco-Egyptian armies as well as the trade companies initially circumvented the sultan's forces, thus avoiding further confrontation with Darfur. But their existence soon was noticed in Darfur as well. It was at this point that a new phenomenon was introduced to the Darfur area, as to all other areas where the central government

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[16]   During this time, the capital of Darfur was moved from several locations west of Jebel Marra to El-Fasher, a choice that might not seem convincing when considering Darfur's later delimitations again, where El-Fasher became "strangely off centre" (Prunier 2005: 15).

of the Turco-Egyptian regime had little or no control: by assembling the foundation of the Sudanese state, Khartoum was linked to the south, east and west through a structure of organized raids and the distribution of firearms, thus creating an overall 'culture of banditry', which – with different characteristics – is still active today.[17] In this form of quasi rule, control over volatile areas is maintained by providing weapons to local groups, which then act as agents for the central regime. At the same time, the weapons find their way to all other groups through trade or theft, thus providing the grounds for new forms of conflict, apart from a general increase in all forms of banditry.

In 1874 one of the king-like traders and slave raiders, Zubayr Rahman Mansur, caused a major rupture in Darfurian power and instigated what was later called the 'Times of Troubles' or 'Time of the Bandits'[18] in Darfur's history. After a quarrel between Zubayr and Sultan Ibrahim of Darfur, Zubayr's army killed the sultan and easily overwhelmed the outmoded Darfurian forces. With Darfur considerably weakened, the Turco-Egyptian army followed on the heels of Zubayr's army, taking over administration and imposing heavy taxation. The followers of Sultan Ibrahim went into hiding in the mountains of Jebel Marra to resist the new regime. Darfur's subjugation lasted through the reigns of several 'shadow sultans', and in 1883, the Mahdiyya[19] reached Darfur after the Turco-Egyptian Empire was overthrown. Many of Darfur's former allies surrendered at this point to the Mahdi, while others changed alliance and joined their former enemy, the sultan of Wadai.

During the 'Times of Troubles', disorder was caused not only by the repeated attempts of the Mahdist forces to end the continuous resistance of the Fur. Kapteijns (1985) characterized the instability and turmoil of that period on one hand as physical, with soldiers of either side plundering villages and disrupting trade, and on the other hand as political, "because the local rulers who had submitted to the new regime still had to reckon with a possible restoration of the sultanate, and kept considering and reconsidering their attitudes" (ibid.: 63). The Wadaian sultanate during this time became stronger and expanded further to the east. Wadai resisted expansion of the Mahdist regime into its territory with support of the

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[17] See de Waal (2004) and Beck (2005) for accounts of how consecutive governments of Sudan used banditry structures to cause unrest and insecurity in an area or to counter insurgencies.

[18] As Prunier notes, "*Umm Kwakiyya* (lit. 'the mother of banditry') was the name given in Darfur to the period going from the conquest of Zubeyr Rahman Mansur in 1874 to the fall of the Mahdiyya and the restoration of the Sultanate in 1898" (2005: 168, footnote 37).

[19] The Mahdiyya was "a millenarian movement for the revival of Islam, or more particularly, for the restoration of the true Islamic community of the Prophet's days, at the end of time. It took the form of a *jihad* or holy war of independence against the Turco-Egyptian occupation and led to the establishment of an independent 'Sudanese' state" (Kapteijns 1985: 73). Kapteijns maintains that the Mahdist Sudan was in many ways a successor state to the Turkiyya.

Sanusi brotherhood,[20] a Sufi order, with which the sultanate had established strong bonds since the extension of trade connections to Central Africa and the Mediterranean after the mid nineteenth century (Meier 1995: 33).

The increased overall instability and readiness to go to war caused the development of new socio-political structures. Large numbers of the Fur population sought refuge in the east, where most of them were enslaved either by the border sultanates or Wadai. But even to those leaders who had first embraced the ideology of the Mahdiyya, the presence of the Mahdist armies became more and more unbearable. Wherever the soldiers came through the countryside, they pillaged, and confiscated anything that came their way. In 1888, Abu Jummayza, a foreigner in his thirties who apparently came from Libya, proclaimed himself as a 'Son of Sanusi' and managed to build up a large western front against the *ansar*, the followers and armies of the Mahdiyya. This particular movement was described by Kapteijns, who showed in minute detail the existing possibilities and limits of alliance and opposition in the frontier zone during this phase of rapid change. Bearing certain distinctive similarities to the present situation in Darfur, the rebellion of Abu Jummayza, in the phase of its initial success, was able to reactivate old loyalties and mobilize cooperative alliances, overcoming traditional fears and feuds. Abu Jummayza apparently had seven sultanates on his side that had previously been fighting against and enslaving each other, among them the Tama, Qimr, Masalit, Zaghawa and Fur. Although Abu Jummayza and his followers did not resist the religious ideals introduced by the Mahdi, they revolted against what they perceived as foreign rule imposed on them by the Mahdi's successor, the Khalifa Abdullahi. The later failure of the movement and split of Abu Jummayza's alliance shows "how the old competition and mutual distrust proved too persistent to be more than temporarily suppressed" (Kapteijns 1985: 83f.).

Before the Mahdist armies could react to the revolt in Darfur, the Mahdist movement was overthrown in 1898 during the re-conquest of the Sudan by Anglo-Egyptian troops.[21] The defeat took place in the Mahdist capital of Omdurman, a city newly erected in the vicinity to Khartoum. The British re-installed the Darfur sultanate with Sultan 'Ali Dinar,[22] who regained some of Darfur's former strength and power. At the same time, due to the death of the Wadaian Sultan

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[20] The Sanusi order retained close control of trade routes by building *zawiya*, which Prunier depicts as a "combination of religious school, traveler's hostel, monastery and fortress. The *zawiya* of the Senussiyya brotherhood drew a network of strongpoints extending from Libya down to the northern part of today's Central African Republic, constituting a kind of quasi-state across the Sahara" (2005: 170).

[21] For the Anglo-Egyptian era in the Sudan that started in the mid nineteenth century, was interrupted by the Mahdiyya and regained power in 1898, see Daly (1986 and 1991) regarding the period after 1898.

[22] See Theobald (1965) for an account of 'Ali Dinar's years as sultan of Darfur from 1898–1916 and O'Fahey and Spalding (1974) for the history of Sudanic kingdoms.

Yusuf in 1898, Wadai fell into civil war over the question of who would be the rightful successor. Not until Sultan Dud Murra gained the Wadaian throne in 1902 was peace partially restored. But Dud Murra would become preoccupied with the French conquest proceeding rapidly from the western Lake Chad area. Continuing internal power struggles and the battles against the French – who were concerned with fighting the economically overpowering Sanusiyya, chasing away political leaders who did not cooperate and installing puppet leaders – finally forced Dud Murra to withdraw east into Dar Masalit.

To many outside observers, as Meier (1995: 142ff.) notes, the defeat of Wadai symbolized the last brick in the construction of a French Africa from Dakar and Algeria to the Congo. The French '*œuvre de civilisation*' was completed with the fall of this 'last barbaric bastion', but the area proved difficult to control. With Dud Murra fighting the French together with the Masalit and the Tama from the east, many of the border sultanates like Zaghawa, Tama, Masalit, Sila and Runga went back under Darfur's authority. To the French military in Wadai who were interested in further expanding their area of influence, Darfurian opposition was a problem not to be solved by military force alone, because by the early twentieth century, the delimitation of a border between the French colony and the Sudan of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium had become an issue in London, Paris and Cairo. On top of that, a large part of the French army was unexpectedly beaten by the united followers of Dud Murra and the Masalit Sultan Taj al-Din during an 'inspection' into Dar Masalit in 1910, causing another peak of overall resistance. But by 1912, an overwhelming response by the French military ended resistance along the border and Dud Murra was exiled.

Colonial times and beyond: different conditions for the independent states

During colonial rule the border between the former sultanates became much more of a dividing line as compared to the 'in-between-zone' it had been before. Although the people living in the area were still freely crossing the border in both directions, they adapted to thinking in terms of belonging to national states in addition to their various regional, ethnic, linguistic or religious affiliations. Colonial policies of the French and Anglo-Egyptian administrations differed considerably in the ways power structures were imposed, but not in their overall principles of rule. While the French, for instance, drew the lines between their administrative areas or *subdivisions* rather arbitrarily, the British system of indirect rule[23]

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[23] The British colonial policy of indirect rule is based on the ideas developed by Frederick Lugard at the beginning of the twentieth century. Prunier's comments grasp the positive and negative side of this policy: "'Indirect Rule' could be considered either as a prime example of racism or alternatively as the most culturally respectful of possible colonial policies. In summary, the British should exercise their power only through the agency of local traditional authorities which would respect native culture, avoid affronting local sensibilities, and introduce changes gently

was based on the traditional system of the *dur*, that is, the lands belonging to larger ethnic entities, which the British perceived as being well separated from other entities. Neglecting the above mentioned mixture of populations in the various *dur* of the border region, the British awarded territories to single groups, thereby forcing the people to accept British views of territorial authority.[24] They introduced the 'native administration'[25] system, which allowed newly installed 'paramount chiefs' to perform certain judicial functions and to allocate land to residents and newcomers, although this did not include land ownership rights. The problems with this system became clearer when arable land became scarce due to ecological changes. Under the original division, for instance, most of the nomadic Arab population[26] of the region had not been assigned *dur*. In the early to mid 1980s, after several periods of severe Sahelian droughts, this lack of land became one of the origins of the current violent escalations in Darfur, as will be elaborated below.

French colonial rule was based on structurally reforming the sultanates, mainly by depriving the former elites of their power and setting up local structures with *chefs de village* and *chefs de canton* at the lowest administrative levels. At this level, the local chiefs held judicial and police functions, collected taxes and supervised public works. As Meier (1995) holds, they were "men for everything in the administration" (ibid.: 151). Many of them felt subordinated to the French regime, their power barely extending beyond the local level. Whereas Wadai thus constitutes one of the 'heaviest' impositions of foreign rule in French colonial history, Darfur, on the other side of the border, remained under 'very light' British control. But although they did not enforce rule as much as their French neighbors, the British policy could, at the same time, justifiably be criticized as gravely neglectful. Prunier noted that "economic and social underdevelopment contained the seeds of future conflicts which would eventually be much worse than the simple criminal cases or problems of pasture and well management that

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and in harmony with the local order. Opponents of this philosophy called it a recipe for stagnation and for building a two-tiered society in which the natives, on the pretext of cultural integrity, were marginalized from the benefits of the modern world which the colonialists could monopolize for their own advantage" (2005: 29).

[24] Al-Battahani (2005: 12) highlights the fact that during British indirect rule, land was allocated in favor of the "larger tribes", often incorporating smaller groups into larger units against their will, and thereby causing new forms of conflict over independence between groups along minority/majority lines.

[25] See Azzain (2004) for indigenous and colonial practices of administration and conflict management.

[26] As shown above, some of today's Arab populations in Darfur can reasonably be considered as 'early settlers'. The southern Darfurian Rizeigat, for instance, gained their own claim to a land or *dar* from the times of their first settlement, while others, like the northern Rizeigat were never allocated a *dar* of their own, which created enormous tensions over the centuries (Flint/de Waal 2005: 41f.).

the tribal administration sponsored by the Condominium authorities had had to deal with" (2005: 32). Thus both colonial regimes imposed substantial changes in the administrative structures concerning rules, justice, land tenure and other issues; and differences between the two regimes have to be referred to as gradual in their methods as well as their outcomes.

Thus, the independent states of Sudan and Chad – the Sudan became independent in 1956 and Chad in 1960 – differed in their internal structures, but had comparable problems. Today people in both countries tend to be nostalgic about colonial times because inherent conflicts between groups seemed to be more under control.[27] When transmitting their power and ruling positions to African officials, both colonial regimes, however, tended to concentrate only on a small part of the population of each country.

As has been previously observed regarding colonial rule in the regions, the British, when transferring governmental power to Sudanese rulers, continued to follow existing patterns of authority and conferred all powerful positions to the northern Muslim elites, thereby solidifying Muslim domination in the country. After the British left Khartoum, it was these elites that stayed in power – in changing regimes until today. In Chad, the French policy of assimilation relied on the people from the country's south, mainly from the Sara sedentary farming community, who accepted Christian faith and teaching and the French curricula more readily than the northern Chadian Muslims, who not only resisted Christian education but also closer cooperation with the colonial regime in general. With all formerly powerful Muslim empires considerably weakened if not ended by the French, the first Chadian president Tombalbaye emerged from the Sara group, whose people took over most positions in the government, administration, private sector and military during the first decade of Chadian independence.

This first independent Chadian government lasted fifteen years, although there was already considerable resistance against him by 1966.[28] Felix Malloum, another southerner, toppled Tombalbaye in 1975, and in 1979 the first member of the northern Chadian guerrillas, Goukouni Weddeye, who received strong support from Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, took over the presidency. Since then, the presidency as well as all senior government and military positions have remained in the hands of northern and Muslim Chadians from different ethnic origins. Although southern Chadians still hold most positions in the public sector, including banking, education, and non-governmental and international organizations, this

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[27] See also Beck (2003) for an account of how the colonial Sudan maintained a certain control of its peripheral areas while consecutive post-colonial governments increasingly relied on a system of supporting local militias for lack of control. In Chad, people reminisced about the order French rule had brought about, which afterwards never was achieved again to that extent.

[28] See Buijtenhuijs (1978, 1987) for detailed accounts of the FROLINAT (Front de Libération Nationale du Tchad, see below) rebellions in Chad.

change of power from southern to northern Chad altered the face of the country and excluded the south from the political decision-making processes.

In both countries, revenues from natural resources[29] as well as key positions are distributed amongst the small clique of the ruling elite, and development throughout the countries is gravely neglected. With all this being the case, it must be said that the Sudanese civil wars, particularly after the renewed outbreak in 1983, bear an overall cruelty and terror not experienced in the Chadian case, at least not since the time of Hissein Habré.[30] In the end, when looking at all factors that divide the north and the south in the neighboring states, religion and economics play the most critical role[31] – with oil, as the most profitable resource, being found in the southern parts of both countries, but exploited by the ruling northern groups. The British transfer of power to the already powerful northern elite in Sudan helped to enforce this group's already long existing perception that the non-Muslim southern Sudanese as well as the Muslim sedentary populations of parts of northern Sudan were "*zurqa*" – black – and thus potential slaves, to be excluded from participation in the exclusive circles of national rule (Duffield 2001, El-Tom 2005).

To sum up the current state of affairs in both countries, the characteristic features of the Sudan are its intensified turn towards fundamentalist Islam with the ascendancy of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir's NIF (National Islamic Front, since 1998 'National Congress Party') government in 1989, and the government's continuing manipulation of ethnic differences and the underlying conflict potential

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[29] Sudan produces oil since 1999 in cooperation mainly with Malaysia, China and India; Chad since 2003 with a consortium of American and Malaysian companies. See, among many others, Kok (1992), Verney (1999), Human Rights Watch (2003), Gagnon and Ryle (2001), Gary and Karl (2003), Gary and Reisch (2005) and Pegg (2005) for detailed information on oil in Chad and Sudan.

[30] The times before and during Hissein Habré's rule signify the most violent part of post-independence Chadian history. With frequent changing of sides first as premier minister under the three year rule of the southern General Malloum, then together with Goukouni Weddeye and Libyan help against Malloum, later against Weddeye and Libya with the help of Egypt, the Sudan, the US and later France, his rule and the war against Libya tore the country into almost fifteen years of constant military operations and gravest insecurity. Thousands of people fled the country, but many thousands were also killed and tortured by his regime. In 1990 he was overthrown by one of his former army commanders, the present president of Chad, Idriss Déby. Today Habré lives in exile in Senegal and a final decision to try him before an international court is still pending.

[31] Although oil constitutes the most profitable resource in both countries, the southern parts also hold the potential for higher revenues in agricultural and cotton cultivation. While in Chad, all cultivation is concentrated in the south – an inheritance from French colonial rule, where the southern part has even been named "*le Tchad utile*" compared to the northern "*Tchad inutile*" – the Sudanese regime only developed commercial cultivation schemes in the northern and central part of the country for fear of giving the south too much of an asset at hand (see Duffield 2001: 205).

for proxy warfare – that is, arming one group against its direct neighbor – in order to maintain political office by weakening resistance and preventing alliances, and thus keeping control over oil fields and other economic factors. Chad's most striking features are its extreme poverty (the country ranks fifth worldwide), and its lack of infrastructure, in spite of a relatively calm phase after Idriss Déby's overthrow of Hissein Habré in his 1990 coup d'état. With the change of power from a southern to a northern elite group in Chad, today's subjugation of the south takes on a different character than in the Sudan, where the south until now, apart from rebellion, has hardly had the possibility of influencing national politics or public and institutional life.

Southern Chadian rebellion never had the impact that the Sudan People's Liberation Movement / Army (henceforth SPLM) had in the Sudan. Still, Chad remains strongly affected by the severe civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s. The extreme fractiousness and internal fighting of the FROLINAT (Front de Libération Nationale du Tchad) guerrilla movement, and Libyan claims to the northern Aouzou Strip[32] – coupled with Muammar Gaddafi's political interests in Chad and the involvement of the US and France in the Chadian civil war – leave the impression that the state has completely neglected the population and left the administration of public services to local warlords and rebel armies. Today, the state in Chad has managed to establish military control over much of its territory. And while an Arab vs. African 'racial' divide is not significant in Chad, it is the fact that the national military consists exclusively of the president's Zaghawa ethnic group that not only seems to be at the heart of the population's grievances, but which also accounts for the recent power struggles within this ethnic group over the national presidency.

The Chad/Sudan border region today as a site of integration and conflict

Although the Chad/Sudan border has become a clear-cut dividing line – as has been demonstrated above – it continues to display distinctive traits of both, cross-border integration and cross-border conflict. A characteristic feature of integration in this region is the longstanding orientation towards the Sudan by people living in both countries related to the colonial disempowerment of Wadaian elites. After Wadaian influence was largely drawn out of the frontier zone, Wadai's former tributaries and dependent sultanates were left in want of a larger

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[32] Gaddafi's revolutionary thoughts were not only centered around his idea of an Arab corridor into 'Black Africa' based on feelings of cultural Arab supremacy, but he was also fighting to control the Aouzou Strip, a piece of supposedly uranium-rich land bordering Chad, which Mussolini had claimed during the Italian occupation of Libya in 1938 against the border treaty signed by France and Italy in 1935 (see Burr and Collins 1999).

ally. Neither the colonial state nor the post-colonial southern Chadian regime nor the subsequent rebel fractions and warlords that ruled Wadai until 1990 provided to the population a trustworthy successor to the former sultanate. As a result, by the late 1920s, people from the Chadian side east of the former Wadai sultanate were moving into British ruled territory because of "a tightening up of administration in general and a drastic tax collection campaign in Wadai" (Kapteijns 1985: 238).

During this time, western Sudanese labor migration to the Nile Valley started on a larger scale. Safer roads and desire for tea, sugar, and factory-made cloth, created demand for hard currency, which could be earned in the agricultural schemes of maize cultivation in regions like Gadarif or Gezira. Another motive for migration from the west to the Nile Valley was religion. Since the British and post-colonial Chadian governors were Christians, many local Muslims sought the 'neo-Mahdist' residence of the late Mahdi's son, Sayid Abd-er-Rahman al-Mahdi, one of the biggest cotton lords of the Gezira scheme and founder of the *Umma* party.[33] The ensuing Chadian regimes left the population on the Chad/Sudan border feeling less and less well governed; the people preferred migration to the Sudanese side. Whereas the local elites' influence was reduced in Chad, the former elites in colonial Darfur upheld their primacy, controlling landownership rights and governance in their areas.[34] However, the claims to land and leadership of the Fur – the largest ethnic group in the area – over the most fertile area of central Darfur was increasingly contested by other parts of the population.

The 1980s mark a major rupture after independence in Chad and Sudan. Overall insecurity led up to civil war, caused by the triple catastrophe: firstly, severe droughts coupled with the failure of both national governments to manage the emerging water and food shortage; secondly, by the Chadian civil war that spread across the border; and thirdly, the Libyan sponsored invasion into the border

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[33] The 1986 elections where Sayid Abd-er-Rahman al-Mahdi's grandson Sadiq al-Mahdi was elected President of Sudan marked the coming-up of the *Umma* Party in Darfur. As Marchal comments the high percentage of voters for this party in Darfur, these results translate a profound historic continuity: "since the participation in the Mahdist uprising against the Ottomans until today, the *Umma* functioned as a total institution because of its quasi religious brotherhood, the *Ansar* (…). [The Party] was in charge of religious life, the traditional leaders and local administration, the public sphere" (Marchal 2004: 51, my translation). Apart from the above mentioned Sanusiyya and the Neomahdist groupings mentioned here, other brotherhoods or *tariqa*s maintain an important political influence in the larger region of Chad and Sudan, like the Tijaniyya, which has also been influential in the Darfur peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria, or the Mirghaniyya, a brotherhood exclusive for people of northern Sudanese origin (see Karrar 1992 on the Sufi brotherhoods in the Sudan).

[34] Even today, the sultan of Dar Masalit, residing in El Geneina, the capital of western Darfur, takes recourse to a colonial document, which guaranteed him the right to secede from the rest of the Sudan on the premise of a quasi autonomy granted to him during Anglo-Egyptian rule (personal communication by Ibrahim Adam Ahmed, N'Djaména 2000).

zone, which transformed the region into a de facto Libyan territory during much of the 1980s (Prunier 2005: 70). It was during this time that international involvement, the impositions of both central governments, and internal opposition intensified in an unprecedented manner that led to the current crisis. Marchal (2004: 49) observed that all these elements of an escalation were multiplied without a single one having the potential of destabilizing the situation in such a radical way as can be observed today.

Culmination of factors leading to an intensification of warfare in the 1980s

Since the 1970s the ecological deterioration caused by droughts – particularly in the more arid zones of the northern border region – has caused more people to move south and to stay there longer than they normally would during their usual phases of transhumance. As a result, tensions between farmers and herders of different groups in central Darfur intensified. These tensions coincided in the early 1980s with the appointment of the first regionally recruited government of Darfur since the times of Sultan 'Ali Dinar. President Nimeiri installed this government after continuous protests by Khartoum-based Darfurians against the neglect of their region by the central government. But Ahmed Ibrahim Diraige (an ethnic Fur), the appointed governor, and his deputy Mahmoud Jamaa (an ethnic Zaghawa) soon faced irresolvable problems in Darfur. The mounting ethnic tensions, in the beginning, did not represent the most pressing and central problem of all ensuing events. But Sharif Harir, in his account of the phases leading up to large scale civil war in Darfur during the 1980s, argues that the local government, which appointed positions according to ethnic background (and eventually took different sides in the conflicts) did not help but rather aggravated the situation (1994: 161), regardless of the integrity of individual politicians (Marchal 2004: 51, Prunier 2005: 50). Without any help from the Sudanese government of President Nimeiri to provide water and food in order to reduce tensions and save the population from starvation, Diraige threw in the towel and left Darfur in 1983.

During the Sahelian droughts of the 1970s and 1980s that culminated in the 1983/84 famine, the influx of groups from all sides into the more fertile central Jebel Marra area of the Fur caused rising competition over access to land and water. Although the Fur usually received their guests with hospitality and shared their resources during normal transhumant influx as well as other in-migrations, the demands of all incoming groups could not at this juncture be met. By the end of the 1980s, the intensification of the struggle took the form of a racist war,

where different groups started fighting against each other with modern weaponry, burning villages and killing indiscriminately.[35]

These conflicts were extremely aggravated by the additionally disturbing and destructive presence in Darfur of the Chadian troops of Hissein Habré, who was preparing to stage a coup against his opponent, Goukouni Weddeye, the president of Chad. In Darfur, he was backed by Sudan's president Nimeiri, but military aid was provided to Habré also by the US, Saudi Arabian and Egyptian governments (Harir 1994: 164, Buijtenhuijs 1991: 132). After his successful coup in 1982, Habré took the Chadian Zaghawa, who had helped him in Darfur on his way to power, into his ethnic alliance ruling Chad. At the same time, the Libyan leader Gaddafi feared to lose influence in Chad after his protégé Goukouni Weddeye was overthrown. Thus, he started to look for allies who were not represented in Habré's government. In accordance with his ideas about Pan-Arabism and Arab supremacy, Gaddafi started recruiting Arab groups from Darfur and Wadai to build up opposition against Habré. He found a willing partner in Asheikh ibn Oumar,[36] the leader of the Chadian rebel group CDR (Conseil Démocratique Révolutionnaire), who was ready to lead an alliance of Arab groups coming mainly from northern Wadai and provide them with abundant weapons. This meant that on top of the conflicts arising from drought and famine proxy warfare between Chad and Libya was fought out in the border region.

When the Sudanese president Nimeiri, who had been supporting Habré, fell in 1985, military hindrance to Libyan recruitment in Darfur was also removed. Thus, Libya's massive supply of weapons poured into the conflict area at the same time that Chad-based Arab opposition groups and their cattle had fled Chad because of revenge attacks by Habré's soldiers. They escaped into the fertile Darfurian Jebel Marra range because the mountainous landscape made it difficult for Chadian government expeditionary forces to follow them. The new Sudanese president, Sadiq al-Mahdi, who had replaced Nimeiri after elections held in 1986,

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[35] The *Janjawid*, during the 1980s mostly made up of Arab groups from northern Darfur and Wadai, came up during these years of warfare in the area, when fighting had been influenced by outside involvement and taken on racist and ideological leanings, heavily laden with "tribal bigotry" (Harir 1994: 165).

[36] "Members [of the Conseil Démocratique Révolutionnaire (CDR)] were Chadians of Arab origin, most originating in Ouaddaï Prefecture or Batha Prefecture, with close ties to Libya and receptive to some of the ideological precepts of Muammar Qadhafi. After the death of its founder, Acyl Ahmat, the CDR was headed by Acheikh ibn Oumar. …Believed to number up to 3,000 at its peak in the early 1980s, the CDR dwindled to fewer than 1,000 adherents before it was battered… in 1987" (Library of Congress, http://www.country-data.com/frd/cs/chad/-td_appnb.html). Since 1976 Acyl Ahmat Ashbakh had been in Libyan exile. He gathered Arab groups on the Chadian side among the Mahamid Arabs, who shared with him Gaddafi's ideological ideas of a grand Arab nation. The name and fierce rule of Acyl is well remembered among the Chad/Sudan border population as one of the warlords who rendered the area most insecure during the 1980s years of war and famine (personal communication).

did not resist Libyan presence in the border area, nor did he prevent the influx of weapons to Gaddafi's newly found allies.[37]

During this period of intensifying warfare, many things happened simultaneously. A factor further amplifying the situation was the renewed rebellion of the southern Sudanese SPLM under John Garang against the northern Sudanese government in 1983. In 1985 Sadiq al-Mahdi, searching for a 'cheap'[38] way to counter the SPLM and prevent their expansion into Darfur, armed the *Murahilin*, a group of fighters recruited from the southern Darfurian Rizeigat and installed them as militias against the SPLM. Concurrently, the Fur, who already had *fort à faire* with the large-scale Zaghawa penetration of Fur territory from the north, were also attacked by these Rizeigat militias from the southern side (Marchal 2004: 45). By 1987 Habré, who rightly feared a coup against him from the Sudanese side, armed willing partners most opposed to his enemies in the region: the non-Arab Fur, Masalit and other central and western Darfurian sedentary populations that felt neglected by all sides. At the same time, the Sudanese Zaghawa, initially not too involved in the Chadian conflict, mobilized opposition against Habré by siding with his opponent, Idriss Déby. Déby originates from the Chadian Zaghawa Bideyat and promised influence and station to his supporters. In 1989 the Sudanese president Sadiq al-Mahdi was overthrown by a group of middle rank military officers led by Omar Hassan al-Bashir. Al-Bashir, who in contrast to Sadiq was against Habré, did not hinder Déby and the Zaghawa to prepare the coup in Darfur,[39] which they successfully executed in early December 1990 with the help of Libya.

With Déby's takeover in Chad and al-Bashir as new president in the Sudan, warfare in both countries eased almost immediately. The Zaghawa, who, as Marchal (2004: 46) put it, did not react 'too modestly' after their triumph in N'Djaména, raided parts of Wadai in order to regain the areas that the people of the Libyan backed Arab warlord Asheikh ibn Oumar had brought under their control during the years of war and chaos. Marchal suggests that the Chadian Arab refugees

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[37]   Sadiq al-Mahdi, grandson to Sayid Abd-er-Rahman al-Mahdi, had been hosted by Tripoli during the years of Nimeiri's reign and had maintained ties with Gaddafi after his return to the Sudan.

[38]   See Alex de Waal's (2004) frequently quoted article in the London Review of Books, "Counterinsurgency on the cheap", which aptly characterizes the Sudanese government's method of fighting rebellion for more than twenty years.

[39]   Sudanese help for Déby was more of a *laissez-faire* than an active help. At this time the Sudanese army was highly involved in overthrowing Mengistu in Ethiopia. Déby was granted the right to take what he wanted and to freely move in the region. General Tijani Adam Taher, a close confidant of Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who also belonged to the ruling junta in Khartoum, had gone to school with Déby in Kornoy and played a leading role in this. It should also be mentioned that many in Khartoum were against Déby's presence in Darfur and were ready to reach an agreement with Habré in the fall of 1990 when continuing attacks on Darfurians caused more and more casualties.

to the Sudan, who fled during the Zaghawa campaigns, became some of the later recruits of the renewed *Janjawid* militias in northern Darfur after the 2003 insurgency. But the Fur and Masalit, who had been supported by Habré towards the end of his regime, fell from favor. Neither Déby nor al-Bashir was willing to support what they perceived as either Habré's allies or the opponents of Arabism, respectively.

During the early 1990s, socio-political development differed in Chad and Sudan. In Chad, the Zaghawa military together with the new regime's administration took firmer control of the whole country, and by 1996, Déby held 'democratic' elections. Conflict in Darfur although slowed did not cease. In 1994, the new Sudanese government instigated a constitutional reform that divided all Sudanese regions into smaller parts. The newly gained positions and land rights throughout the split territories were mainly given to the Arab allies of the government who previously did not hold land rights or political offices in the area, thereby reducing the authorities of the three largest landholding groups in Darfur – the Zaghawa, Fur and Masalit – to mere tribal chiefs. The central government did not intervene in the resulting conflicts and fighting soon broke out again, first between Masalit and Arabs, causing tens of thousands to flee into neighboring Chad. Whereas before there had been heavy factionalism inside Darfur, with this new measure from the government, the Zaghawa and the Fur found themselves not as opposed to each other as one might have suspected after their fierce opposition during the conflicts in the 1980s. After a phase of relative calm, those groups of Darfur, now deprived by the state, who held the common claim to have been landowners and rulers, allied against their common opponent – the current government of Sudan.

Excursion: Local perceptions of the relations between 'Arabs' and 'Africans' in Chad and Sudan

In the following excursion into the data collected during my field research in 2000 and 2001, two points shall be underscored: first, the rupturing influence of the successive national governments of Chad and Sudan on the rather flexible structures of alliance and opposition that historically prevailed in the border region; and second, the subsequent hardening of differences along racial and ethnic lines, which can be observed to varying degrees in the two states and in accordance with their governmental politics. It gives a brief insight into the time period shortly before the outbreak of the 2003 rebellion, that is, the phase during or directly after the confrontations in Dar Masalit that resulted from the constitutional

reform mentioned above.[40] My informants were mainly Masalit and Arabs from various large families, who were residents in Chad or had recently come to Chad as refugees. Some of them were well aware that as a result of the constitutional reform, Masalit in higher positions of the local government in El Geneina were replaced with northern Sudanese in the administration and in the military. They saw the conflict originate in towns and soon afterwards sweep into to the rural areas, where the attacks on Masalit villages reached their first peak in 1998, causing several thousand people to flee to the Chadian side.[41]

Here, I feel it necessary to say a word about the dichotomy between 'Arabs' and 'Africans' often quoted in representations of the current Darfur conflict. As is inherent to all polarizations, this dichotomy reduces the actual complexity and diversity as well as the existing possibilities of changing identities that lie behind the terms. When I collected the data in 2001, Sudanese Masalit referred to the attacks which caused their flight as ones launched by 'Arabs'. They knew, nonetheless, that their actual neighbors in the Sudan, formerly nomadic Arab families who had settled in their immediate vicinity decades earlier, had not taken part in the fighting. It is, therefore, necessary to look at the contexts in which this dichotomy is invoked in the local setting. Since the 1980s when people discuss the conflicts in Darfur they refer to 'Arabs' as those who are supported by the newly installed northern governors of Darfur and by the government of Sudan, and who thus have gained extended rights to land and better access to public services than the other groups. The Masalit, on the other hand, consider themselves the 'original owners' of all the land in 'Dar Masalit'. They thus have played the autochthony card, as natives deprived of their rights. When I speak of 'Arabs' in relation to the research findings, therefore, several meanings according to context can be evoked: one refers to those families who had settled in Dar Masalit due to previous droughts in the northern parts of Chad and Sudan and later became refugees during the recent clashes; another relates to the groups of various (also Arab)

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[40] A detailed account of the events preceding the renewed outbreak of violence in Dar Masalit had also been given to me in a handwritten manuscript by Adam Ahmed Ibrahim and Khamis Yousouf Haroun (2001).

[41] From 1998 onwards, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees had opened an office in Abéché, assisting the refugees together with the World Food Programme. Already in 1984, the UNHCR had intervened from the Sudanese side. In the memories of the people I talked to, the 1984 famine had so far been one of the worst phases in their lives. Not only had they been living in constant insecurity and danger coming from Habré's or Asheikh ibn Oumar's soldiers raiding villages and killing people at random, but their harvests after years of bad rainfall were not sufficient to support their families. Almost everybody had fled to Sudan; villages on the Chadian side were deserted, and whole village structures completely changed after the return of the people. Many of those who had fled the Chadian side in the 1980s had planned never to return, and, despite the insecure situation in Darfur, only came back during the clashes caused by the governmental changes just before 2000. Compare accounts of this emergency intervention by UNHCR (1984), Maxwell (1986), Doornbos (1987), Ruiz (1987) and de Waal (1988, 1989).

origin who have been instrumentalized by the Sudanese state to counter the Darfur insurgency, generally called the *Janjawid.*

Although aware before my actual research of the increasingly racialist confrontations on the Sudanese side of the border, I was surprised to find hardly any evidence of these problems just a couple of meters from the physical border (the area of the *Wadi Asoungha* riverbed) in Masalit and Arab villages on the Chadian side.[42] The villages were situated only short distances apart. Thus, Arabs and Masalit not only fetched water in the same nearby wadi, but families from both villages had also known each other for generations. The young Masalit women were particularly familiar with their age mates from the other villages and knew, for example, the interior of Arab houses.[43] After the influx of refugees from the Sudan – who at that stage were integrated mainly into existing villages or were given land outside a village (refugee camps had not yet been installed) – tensions between the groups rose. But, these tensions were far from causing outright fighting. Rather, the problems reported to me by both Arabs and Masalit farmers and traders were mainly about attacks by members of the Chadian army. The common antipathy of the population was therefore geared towards 'the Zaghawa', the term standing for Chadian military and police in general. Indeed, during the months of my stay, frequent cattle theft and deadly attacks on traders returning from market were testified, but people did not report these instances to the police. As one informant put it: "If you are killed, they will say he was a bandit [who cannot be traced, AB]; if you killed him, they will say he was a military man [for whose death the one to report will be punished, AB] (original in French)" – translating into impunity for those who committed these crimes.[44]

In the villages, gruesome stories were told for evening amusement about how Masalit were killed by their own people if they continued to cooperate with the Arabs. In actual fact, however, apart from barter between Masalit and Arab nomads who passed through occasionally, Arabs from the neighboring villages from time to time entered Masalit villages on foot or on horseback to greet friends; Masalit farmers worked for salaries in the few fields some of the Arabs had started to cultivate, and Arab camels were rented by the Masalit to collect their harvest. Cattle found spoiling the harvest in the fields were caught by the farmers and put into a kraal, from where Arab women would pick them up and pay a fine

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[42] Apart from the larger towns like the border town Adré, Arabs and Masalit did not live together in the same villages.

[43] Although more or less alike from the outside, Arab houses displayed a rich collection of pots and leather bags as well as, in some cases, large beds decorated with pillows and blankets. Rural Masalit houses normally were not decorated, and pots were stored in kitchen houses, but not on 'display'.

[44] Accounts of attacks around Abéché in 2005 have publicly been attributed to military from the Zaghawa Bideyat, for example at the website of 'Alwihda' under http://www.alwihdainfo.com.

to the village chief for the damage. Children were usually teasing each other and sometimes fights would break out between them, but these problems were regulated on the village level. These accounts of ambivalence between discourse and practice, although showing only minor instances of everyday activities, were also mirrored in the case of an old Masalit farmer whom I visited on his melon field close to the wadi. He told me that every day he had to wait until sunset for the Arab children who were herding goats and sheep to pass his orchard, so that they would not let the animals enter the fields. When the children came by, they stood at the thorn bush fence, laughing and waving their hands, and Abd-er-Rahman, the old man, went to give them a couple of melons to share on the spot.

Of course, friendly behavior of individuals does not give any guarantee that fighting between the groups and a tightening of ethnic identities that transforms into collective hatred might not break out at any time. But tensions like those reported from Darfur, at least at that point in time, were not observable in spite of the close proximity of the neighborhood of different groups on the Chadian side. Masalit refugees from the Sudan who had seen their villages burnt and all their belongings taken by 'Arab horsemen', knew very well that their long time Arab neighbors had not taken part in the attacks. However, they suspected them of having hosted 'strangers', who then forged the attacks against their villages after having 'spied' on what to expect during a raid. In retaliation of past attacks, Masalit farmers did counterattack their former Arab neighbors, causing a good number of Arab herders to take refuge in Chad as well.

From the information gathered in the field, it seems that Arab groups started to settle in the area around the Chadian garrison town of Adré on a permanent basis during the 1940s and 1950s, when land for herding in their own home area around Arada in northern Chad had become scarce. The land for their settlements was given to them by the local Masalit, but not, as the latter emphasized, forever. Fearing repulsion as a consequence to the conflicts on the Sudanese side, the Arabs in some villages recently had the land declared theirs by the ruling sub-prefect, justifying their claims with their Chadian citizenship.[45] The Arab settlements looked similar to those of the Masalit, but they were often larger and much less in number due to the fact that different Arab 'tribes'[46] shared a common space and lived slightly separated from each other in different quarters of a village headed by several 'tribal' and 'village quarter' chiefs, none of them responsible for the whole settlement (see Yalcin-Heckmann, Behrends and Leutloff 2003).

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[45] A similar strategy was reported for the Zaghawa and Arabs on the Sudanese side after the ecological degradation in the 1980s by Harir (1994).

[46] The Arab groups living in the villages of my research were Mahariya, Walad Zeid and Naddja all claiming to come from the northern part of Chad.

One of the most significant differences between Masalit and Arabs that I observed was the free movement of Arabs into Sudanese territory. Arab women with their small children frequently entered Darfur on donkeys to buy and sell in the market in El Geneina, a venue that had once been very attractive for the Masalit as well. But, in contrast to their Arab neighbors, the Masalit did not dare to cross the border any longer, except for very rare and secretive visits to their former houses and fields. Most certainly, they still claimed ownership to their land in the Sudan, a fact they demonstrated by harvesting fields immediately around or on the grounds of their former houses. During the current conflict it has occasionally been reported that Arabs from Chad were now moving into Darfur to settle on the land that the local population had fled. From what I saw and heard in 2000/01, this does not seem realistic, since the land would also not be safe for the Arabs. The Arab groups that I met have remained in Chad all through the recent warring, and they – as many other Arab groups in the region – have not been involved in the violence themselves, although some of the younger men might have crossed the border to join one or the other side of the fighting.[47]

In conclusion of the above and relating to the dissimilar perceptions of 'Arab'-'African' relations in Chad and Sudan, the facts indicate that these discrepancies result from the differing positions of the two national governments concerning that point. When Déby was preparing his coup d'état to topple the regime of Hissein Habré in Chad, he found initial support from the Arab 'people of Acyl'[48] and from Libya. But this or other events in the past never led to an overall ideology of Arab supremacy in the country. People in the Chad/Sudan border region remember that during the times when Acyl and later Asheikh ibn Oumar ruled as warlords over Wadai and Biltine in the 1980s, Arab soldiers enjoyed superior positions. Soon afterwards, however, the Arab warlords and their followers were reduced to the level of the rest of the population after Déby's successful coup in 1990. Their influential positions, military command and impunity more or less transferred to the Chadian Zaghawa. In contrast to the Chadian situation, national politics and external influences from neighboring regimes in Sudan have, over time, substantially altered relations between Arab and non-Arab groups, particularly in Darfur. Today the state is obviously promoting an overall Arab domination over the non-Arab population of the region. It thus becomes evident that conflicts do not arise between groups with opposing interests, e.g. in land, but between groups where one side is guaranteed impunity and full support of the government while the other side is completely neglected by the state.

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[47] Young Arab men are said to also participate in the rebel groups that formed against the government of Sudan.

[48] Accounts of Acyl's influence in Chad are given in Brandily (1984) and Buijtenhuijs (1991).

How did the rebels mobilize support in the current Darfur conflict? Re-enacted patterns of forming and breaking regional alliances

Soon after the al-Qaida attacks on the USA in 2001 the government in Khartoum started to engage in showing the world that it could play in tune with US interests and signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the southern SPLM leader John Garang in January 2005. As mentioned in the beginning of this article, many said that the Darfurian rebels chose that point in time to start a rebellion in order to gain access to the proceedings in Naivasha, where, among other relevant issues, power and wealth sharing in Sudan were debated. Another less debated and less well known possible trigger for the rebellion goes back to 1999, when the Sudanese president al-Bashir fell out with his former mentor and Secretary General of the ruling Congress Party, the fundamentalist and Islamist 'guide', Hassan al-Turabi.[49] Turabi, who subsequently was arrested in Khartoum, had started to build up a large group of new followers (many of them from among the Zaghawa of northern Darfur), promoting their desire to assume control of central politics. This hope was largely diminished with Turabi's arrest, and thus, accelerated a process of re-orientating the Zaghawa and other Darfurians towards armed rebellion. It is the aim of the following part of the paper to show that the structures of the rebel movements in Darfur, their networks and the way they continue to separate and unite in changing constellations, mirror a long history of alliance and opposition within the Darfur/Wadai border region.

These structures become visible by looking at, for example, the recruitment patterns of the rebel groups. To understand who aligns under which umbrella and why, various political, ethnic, social and historical factors have to be considered. Apart from the *Janjawid* militias, who in themselves reflect much of Darfur's history, three rebel groups will briefly be discussed in their development and composition: the first, the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (henceforth SLA) is the group that is usually said to have started the Darfur rebellion in February 2003; second is the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) which went public soon after and joined forces with the SLA; finally is the *Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et la Liberté* (RDL) one of about eight originally formed rebel movements in Chad united under the aim of ousting the current president.

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[49]   Hassan al-Turabi, the 'charismatic leader of the Muslim Brothers', has been a most influential figure in Sudanese politics for several decades. Prunier (2005: 82) describes him as a man who, throughout his political life, engaged in the most unprincipled forms of *talaahuf* (temporary alliances).

Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA)

During the time I spent in Chad in 2001, many villages had a so-called 'horse-chief',[50] who held command over all (younger and older) men with horses. Asked about his tasks, one of these *chefs de chevaux* told me that he was in charge of organizing horse races if something was to be celebrated, but most of all to gather all men with horses in the surrounding villages through a complicated communication chain in cases of theft or murder – in short, to be in charge of reacting to imminent threats and retaliating in the name of the village.[51] I witnessed a couple of this group's activities, such as riding off at the break of day after cows were reported stolen overnight by a gang of masked robbers on horseback, or when a person was reported missing after he had gone across the border into the Sudanese area. The 'horse-chief' and all other villagers used to listen to music tapes of Mubasak, a Masalit singer from Darfur. They sang along when Mubasak, in the repetitive style of Masalit music, called the Masalit to go to war against the Arabs to fetch back the cows that had been stolen: "*Maslati*, gather and follow the Arabs who stole your cows!" But he was also insulting them: "You see the cows on top of the mountains, but you take the path through the valley." The songs accused the young Masalit men who did not fight against the Arab oppressors who had taken over administrative posts and granted impunity to Arab militias after the constitutional reform of 1994.[52] It seems that Mubasak was successful in his agitation.

To the attention of the world public the Darfur rebellion started in February 2003 when the SLA launched their successful attack on the garrison town Golo in eastern Darfur. According to information gathered by Julie Flint (Flint and de Waal 2005: 76), the attacks against government positions had already started two years earlier when the rebels (later SLA) united such local and independently formed self-defense groups like the 'horse-chief's' group from among the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. As Flint (ibid.) came to learn, "by the time of the attack on Golo, war was already raging in Darfur: the rebels were attacking police stations, army posts and convoys, and Jebel Marra was under massive air and ground attack".

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[50] The office of the 'horse-chief' existed alongside a large number of local 'traditional' or 'neo-traditional' offices on the village and *canton*-level, many of which have come into existence during the colonial era – like that of the French imported *chef de canton* – or even more recently through international organizations and NGOs. Other offices were that of the village chief, responsible for matters concerning the village community, the female 'chief of the women' mainly in charge of communicating between NGOs and the women of a village, the 'chief of the refugees' who spoke for the groups of refugees who had come to settle in many of the border villages after the 'Masalit War' 1995–1998, and a 'chief of the young men', an office more likely to be of older origin, who was in charge of supervising dancing events and all matters concerning the village youth in communication with the elders.

[51] Interview with Mahmat Ismael Moussa, Achaba (Chad), October 29, 2001.

[52] Concerning the events that caused the 'Masalit War' in 1994 see Flint and de Waal (2005: 57f.).

Both, Marchal (2004: 54) and Flint/de Waal (2005: 76) suggest that the SLA movement initially was not united by a common project or an overall coordination, but rather was assembled after different localized resistance groups and movements eventually joined together under one common umbrella. The SLA gave its first public declaration under their original name, Darfur Liberation Front (DLF). Soon after their attack on Golo, they met with John Garang in Rumbek. After that, they came up with an agenda and a new name, Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA), which held the desire to be more far reaching in their aims as well as to lean ideologically towards the southern SPLM.[53] The SLA is the movement that, before its internal split, received most support and broadest acceptance by the local population; it recruits mainly from the Fur, Masalit and the Zaghawa Twer.

This group of the Zaghawa, who historically had aligned most often with Arabs in the region and with the government,[54] started to feel overrun and thus uncomfortable with their Arab allies after the events that led to the 'Masalit War' in the mid 1990s. By 1991, Zaghawa elders had complained to President al-Bashir "that the government was creating an 'apartheid region' in Darfur by instigating 'crimes against humanity', manipulating tribal hierarchies for political ends and attempting to turn 'black' tribes against each other" (Sudan Human Rights Organization quoted in Flint and de Waal 2005: 74). In July 2001 the assembled local resistance groups of the Zaghawa Twer joined their efforts with the rebel movement of the Fur and, later still, the Masalit, to fight the national government.

The original SLA was headed by Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur (an ethnic Fur); the movement's Secretary General was Minni Arkoy Minawi (from the Zaghawa Twer). After their initial success as a united group, the SLA split up in 2005, with Minni Arkoy Minawi today leading the Zaghawa section ('SLA/Minni'), and Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur leading the Fur under the 'SLA/Abdel Wahid' (ICG 2006: 3). The causes for this split were discussed in a briefing by the International Crisis Group, which maintained that divisions had been caused mainly

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[53] In 1991 the SPLM tried to extend its influence into Darfur, a region which the organization perceived as similarly neglected as the south of Sudan. This event is well remembered in Darfur in connection to the name of Daud Bolad, a Darfurian who had joined the SPLM and led a rebel section into Darfur. But his advance was ill-fated and short-lived and after Bolad was captured and killed by the ruling regime in 1992, the SPLM did not put forward any further operations in the region (see Harir 1994, Marchal 2004: 47, Prunier 2005: 73f., Flint and de Waal 2005: 81, but also the ICG Africa Briefing No 32, 2005: 3, for the SLA's involvement with John Garang). The fast defeat of Bolad's troops, however, gave birth to the government's notion that rebellion in Darfur could easily be suppressed by falling back on local militias – a notion that proved to be wrong (Flint and de Waal 2005: 117).

[54] For example in the 1980s, prominent Zaghawa Twer backed Libya's plans of pushing an Arab supremacy in Darfur, and in the 1990s they were well represented in the government of the National Islamic Front (NIF) (Marchal 2004: 54).

by personal animosity between the leaders along the "fault line of the two ethnic groups, the Fur and the Zaghawa", although both groups paradoxically agree on the political agenda (2005: 4). By 2006, the split between the factions had become increasingly volatile to the point that their internal fights over territorial gains started to additionally threaten the security of the population, reportedly causing further displacement.[55]

Neither Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur nor Minni Arkoy Minawi had previously had a significant political career, thus international backing and networking was less significant to the movement than the local support of the population. All parts of the SLA had come from the rural population, among whom they found a great number of volunteers, yet after the split, recruitment followed ethnic and sub-regional affiliations. The agenda of the SLA has always been secular. In their first memoranda, which were inspired by John Garang, the rebels claimed that their intentions were directed towards a secularization of the Sudan and an equal and democratic sharing of power and wealth on the national level.

Most recently, since the emergence of the rebel movements in Chad, the Minni-section of the SLA has built up amiable relations with the Chadian president Déby. After the attack of the new Chadian rebel groups on the Chadian border town Adré on January 18, 2006, Déby invited Minni and the leaders of the second Darfur rebel movement, the JEM, to N'Djaména to form a stronger alliance against the Sudanese state. This action created further distance between the SLA-Minni and the SLA-Abdel Wahid factions, prompting Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur to dismiss this newly formed alliance as one "between Zaghawa ethnic groups in Darfur with the Zaghawa regime in N'djamena" (Sudan Tribune, February 11, 2006, quoted in ICG 2006: 12). On May 5, 2006, Minni Arkoy Minawi was the only rebel group leader who signed the African Union mediated peace agreement with the Sudanese state (known as Darfur Peace Agreement, DPA). Although Minawi expressed reservations, UN representative Jan Egeland as well as the mediators of the African Union and their international advisors welcomed his signing the deal.[56] Neither the SLA section of Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur nor the JEM were willing to sign, as they saw the agreement as a "sell-out" of their former objectives to the government of Khartoum.

As of September 2006, dissidents of the former SLA section of Minni Arkoy Minawi formed a new rebel movement, called G-19. This group established a committee of mediators, consisting of tribal elders and native administrators, to find a solution for the war. Meanwhile, the remaining forces of Minnawi have been dubbed 'Janjawid 2' because of their repeated attacks on civilian communities and their assumed collaboration with the Sudanese military. El-Nur's section of the

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[55] See "SUDAN: UN humanitarian chief visits strife-torn Darfur", IRIN, May 7, 2006.

[56] See "SUDAN: Peace deal collapse would be catastrophic for Darfur", IRIN, May 5, 2006.

SLA by now remains the only group that joined neither of the new formations, the G-19 nor the National Redemption Front (NRF), a formation which grew out of the JEM (see below). El-Nur reportedly rejects Islamist ideals and proclaims to strive for more compensation to the Fur farmers than has been granted to them by the Darfur Peace Agreement of May 5, 2006.[57]

Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)

During a Sudan-Conference I attended in 2004 in Hermannsburg, Germany, a number of Sudanese participants were observed making and receiving telephone calls during the sessions, also getting up from their seats and talking excitedly. During the breaks, some of the younger men were quite open about their status: as members of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), they were in constant contact with other members, internationally and on the ground in Darfur via *Thuraya*, a satellite network, which disposes of the global positioning data which pinpoints the position of the speaker – a useful tool when giving outside directions for rebel attacks and locating the opponent's hideouts. During that meeting, the head of the JEM rebel movement, Khalil Ibrahim, wearing a distinguished dark blue overcoat, arrived for a few hours for some confidential dialogue with some of the other conference participants. While many of the Sudanese men present at this meeting claimed to be members of the JEM, who were employed or studying at German and British universities, not a single member of the SLA was present. Most of those present were Zaghawa from the Kobe family. When I asked them about Masalit or Fur in Germany or Britain, hardly any names came to their minds.

The JEM has normally been presented in the media as 'the other prominent rebel group active in Darfur'. Its leader, Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed, had been actively involved in national Sudanese politics before going 'underground'. The JEM movement's structure, its political background and the membership vary considerably from the SLA. The roots of the movement go back to the early 1990s, when a group from the National Islamic Front (NIF), the former party of President al-Bashir, clandestinely discussed reforming the current government "from within" (Flint and de Waal 2005: 92). In 2000 they anonymously published the 'Black Book', which gave account of the marginalization of Darfur in national politics since independence and caused great agitation among the Darfurians and other marginalized groups in Sudan.[58] In 2001, the movement turned away from ambitions to reform the government internally and became an armed movement. Khalil Ibrahim was one of twenty or so men whom the JEM sent outside the country to start an organized opposition movement, reaching out for a national

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[57] See "SUDAN: Rebel fragmentation hampers Darfur peace", IRIN, September 11, 2006.

[58] It can now be downloaded at the JEM website under www.sudanjem.com.

solution to the problems in Darfur (ibid.: 93). Although the supporters of JEM come from different groups, "its military capacity lies in its local base among the Zaghawa Kobe",[59] but its actual strength lies more in the political experience of its leaders (ibid.: 95).

Directly related to the sultan, Khalil Ibrahim is an influential man in both the Sudan and Chad. Before becoming a rebel leader, he was connected to the paramilitary Popular Defense Forces (PDF) in Darfur.[60] Because his good relations to Hassan al-Turabi were well known, Khalil Ibrahim was quickly removed from office after Turabi's arrest in 1999. The PDF were then led by allies to the government of al-Bashir and the new leaders started to strongly side with the Arab groups in the region against other local groups. The JEM's pro-Islamist agenda sparked implications of a direct link to Hassan al-Turabi and his plans to build up an alternative and decentralized movement to counter if not replace the current government in Khartoum. But the movement's members have so far fiercely denied this belief. The movement has attracted support from "across the political spectrum" (ibid.: 89), with most members either successful professionals or in some way politically influential – or aiming to be in the future. Recruitment follows two lines: whereas ethnic factors prevail on the ground, and JEM rebel fighters in Darfur originate mainly from the Zaghawa Kobe, the movement's urban and international recruitment is less influenced by ethnic factors than by its political and religious agenda. Consequently, international backing and influence seem to be far greater with the JEM, albeit with less impact and control over territories on the ground.

Soon after their first public statements, SLA and JEM joined forces. For the minority JEM it made sense to ally to the stronger power on the ground. Regarding their influence on the national governments in Chad and Sudan, the SLA originally had better connections to the Chadian government than the JEM, whose relations to Déby were reportedly bad. JEM was also connected to local rivalries between the influential Zaghawa Kobe and the Bideyat, where Déby was from (Marchal 2005: 12). But with its mainly Sudanese recruitment and without political backing in the Sudan, the SLA movement poses less of a threat to the Sudanese government, although the organization is the more efficient fighting group

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[59] The center of the Kobe sultanate is Tine, a market-town on the international border of northern Darfur and Biltine in Chad. See above for the divisions inside the Zaghawa community.

[60] Popular Defense Forces were originally installed by the government during the war in southern Sudan. To support the national army, local PDF groups were trained and equipped with cars and guns by the government. Marchal and Flint/de Waal hold divergent views on Ibrahim's responsibilities in the PDF forces. While Marchal maintains that Khalil Ibrahim has been in charge of the Sudanese security service, notably responsible for the surveillance of the Chadian Zaghawa and the organisation of the PDF forces (2004: 54), Flint and de Waal merely attribute to him that he "spent four months as a volunteer doctor in the PDF, …[but that he] never held national office" (2005: 91).

on the ground and the two factions hold larger territories than the JEM. It is the JEM's alleged link to the still very powerful Hassan al-Turabi and also their influential connections to the Chadian army that seem to give the JEM greater political impact on both regimes. In the beginning of the rebellion, the existence of these two rebel movements, both with support among the Zaghawa, put the Chadian president Déby in a precarious political position: on the one hand, he did not want to alienate his Sudanese ally Omar Hassan al-Bashir by openly backing the Zaghawa; on the other hand, he feared his people's anger should he not come to their help in the Sudan and on the Chad/Sudan border.

At their initiatory meeting in Asmara, Eritrea, on June 30, 2006, the JEM was part of a new umbrella group for rebel factions that are unhappy with the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), called National Redemption Front (NRF). The NRF's founding declaration was signed by JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim, Khamis Abdallah Abakar – former vice-president of the SLA and now the leader of the G-19 – and senior Darfur politicians Sharif Harir and Ahmed Ibrahim Diraige of the Federal Democratic Alliance (FDA), the former governor of Darfur (see above). The Sudanese government reacted with a building up of troops in North Darfur and with the bombing of several villages and towns in the region, where the rebels stay. Concerning the coherence of the new rebel alliance a local observer said that "apart from discontent about the DPA, there is little that keeps this rebel alliance together. The NRF has no political leader and very little political coordination – it is primarily an alliance of military necessity. The NRF is starting to disintegrate at the leadership level. It is a very fluid situation right now."[61] The fact that JEM troops have been observed to move away from the main NRF forces, while a senior officer of the SLA faction of el-Nur – who was strictly against uniting with the NRF – has now joined the movement, demonstrates very conspicuously the temporary character of alliances and oppositions that grow out of necessity and the better option of the moment.

Rebel Groups on the Chadian side of the border

As is well known today, Déby's fears of angering his people when he did not more actively support the Zaghawa in the war in Darfur proved to be justified. On January 18, 2006, rebels of the Chadian *Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et la Liberté* (RDL) attacked the Chadian border town of Adré, and then withdrew again to their bases across the border in West Darfur. Déby, accusing the government of Sudan of supporting these rebels, declared a 'state of belligerence' against Sudan and actively sought international help. Help was given to him in several forms: Colonel Gaddafi of Libya convened a peace summit in Tripoli on February 10, 2006, at which the governments of Chad and Sudan signed a peace

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[61]   See "SUDAN: Rebel fragmentation hampers Darfur peace", IRIN, September 11, 2006.

deal and agreed upon stronger border controls. But despite the deal, rebel activities continued, and on March 20, 2006, Déby's army attacked Chadian rebel bases with the help of the French army.[62]

Déby reacted to the rebellion first by closing the borders to the Sudan in spring 2003, then offering to host peace negotiations in N'Djaména in summer 2003. But after an attempted coup against him from amongst his own people in May 2004, he took a more cautious and diplomatic position, neither confronting the Sudanese government directly for its implication in the conflict nor openly taking the side of the rebels. He did however take the first steps away from the Sudanese president al-Bashir, for instance, by condemning the great number of Sudanese troops assembled near the border of Chad, which he read as an unmistakable sign of building up armed resistance against him.

But unrest against Déby also mounted in other parts of the country, not only because of his hesitance to take sides in the Darfur conflict, but also because he pushed through a constitutional amendment allowing him to run for a third presidential term. He also diverted the annual 10 % of oil revenues earmarked for future generations in order to finance increased military spending, which has significantly increased his national budget since 2003 (see Gary and Karl 2003, Gary and Reisch 2005, Pegg 2005). Since August 2005, Chadian Zaghawa have been deserting the national army in large numbers and moving into the turbulent Chad/Sudan border region, where different Chadian rebel movements have united with the goal of ousting Déby. Originating from different families of the Zaghawa group, parts of these rebels claim support from the Sudanese government and are rumored to be receiving weapons, uniforms, and vehicles from China (among others), which allegedly is interested in gaining more political and economic access in (economically) American- and (militarily) French-dominated Chad. The border region has presented to the Chadian rebels a virtually custom-made base from where the rebel armies can not only conscript young men from the refugee camps, but also receive an abundant and easy flow of weapons and war machinery.

Recent developments have aggravated the situation of regional violence in Darfur into one of near proxy warfare between Chad and Sudan. Although by now more peaceful relations between the two countries have been re-established,[63] the government of Sudan has demonstrated an unmasked interest in helping to overthrow Déby by enlisting the help of Chadian Zaghawa opposed to their president, and by doing so, also weaken the Darfur rebels. On the other side of the

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[62] See "Tchad: Déby accuse le Soudan à partir d'Adré", Alwihda, March 25, 2006, and "CHAD: Residents prepare for war as rebels close in on capital", IRIN, April 12, 2006.

[63] See "CHAD-SUDAN: Diplomatic ties reopened", IRIN, August 9, 2006. With the decrease in tensions, both countries have agreed not to host rebel groups from the other side any longer, a promise that will be hard to keep given the conditions on the ground.

border, Déby explicitly supported those rebels against Sudan, particularly the Zaghawa section of Minni's group that recruits mainly from the Zaghawa Twer.

Parallel to the change of alliances on the national level, the groups' internal structures and mutual relations have also been subject to frequent crossings over. According to interviews conducted by the International Crisis Group (2006: 10), the RDL movement that was responsible for the attack on Adré was formed in August 2005 by Colonel Mahamat Nur, a Tama from northern Wadai (see map). This group is an outgrowth of a former movement, the *Armée nationale de résistance* (ANR), set up in 1994 by Mahamat Garfa, Déby's former Chief of Staff. By then, the Tama of northern Darfur had been advancing occasional attacks against the Chadian military, because they felt that impunity for continuous aggressions from the Zaghawa military against the Tama people had gone too far. The movement was set up across the border in Sudan, where its leaders and combatants settled among their families who had gone to Sudan during the crises in the 1980s (see above). Together with the other rebel forces of mainly Tama, Qimr and Zaghawa that temporarily united under the *Front Uni pour le Changement* (FUC), the RDL has approximately 6000 well equipped soldiers at their disposal in different state sponsored training camps along the Chad/Sudan border. Other groups like the *Socle pour le Changement, l'Unité et la Démocratie* (SCUD) attracted such prominent figures as Déby's twin nephews, Tom Erdimi, who had been in charge of oil operations in Chad and Timan Erdimi, who was the former director of Déby's presidential cabinet. Tom presently lives in exile in the United States; his brother formed a new movement after the original FUC's fragile unity collapsed in March 2006 when some of the participating factions' leaders opposed the leadership of Mahamat Nur (of the RDL), who they complained had been put into the leadership position with the help of Khartoum.[64]

All of these events – amassing rebel forces in a turbulent environment, jockeying for support with the enemy's strongest opponent (such as using al-Bashir against Déby), and the changing clan-based allegiances of rebel groups – are reminiscent of the historical pattern of changing alliance and opposition building in the border region. The Chadian rebel groups, composed mainly of former army soldiers (Chadian Zaghawa), found allies in the Sudanese government to help weaken the Sudanese rebels in Darfur. The recently signed peace agreement between the government of Sudan and the SLA-Minni faction on May 5, 2006 is not likely to have much impact on the Chadian rebels since neither their aim to oust Déby nor their recruitment source (Chadian army) have been affected by the agreement. To the contrary, the disarmament of *Janjawid* militias and rebels proposed in the agreement could cause an influx of combatants into the Chadian rebel groups due to warlord structures and because lawlessness has become commonplace for the

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[64] See "Tchad: Le FUC s'explose en trois parties", Alwihda, March 14, 2006.

many young men who have no incentive to disarm and renounce the benefits of their illicit way of life.[65]

Janjawid

The Sudanese government's immediate reaction to the Darfur rebellion was to generate a 'well-prepared' and armed Arab opposition, a tactic utilized previously in the Masalit War of the mid 1990s. Similar to the counterinsurgency in the 1980s (when Sudanese president Sadiq al-Mahdi gave weapons and impunity to the *Murahilin* fighters to counter the SPLM), the government of al-Bashir has empowered another Arab militia, the *Janjawid*, in order to create an atmosphere of terror and violence. Yet it would be wrong to assume that the *Janjawid* are congruent with the Arab-based combatants of the 1980s' conflicts, who originated mainly from the southern Darfurian Rizeigat. Prunier (2005), as one informed observer, insists on various possible recruitment grounds for the current *Janjawid*, enumerating – apart from young members of local Arab tribes – former bandits, criminals, fanatics and young unemployed Arab men "similar to those who joined the rebels on the 'African' side" (ibid.: 97). This reasoning also takes into account the distinction between the situation in Darfur in the 1980s – when there was region-wide famine and the Chad/Libyan war had swept over into Darfur, and all ethnic groups in the region were competing for food, land and ideology – and currently, when the government has reacted to a rebellion by mobilizing those most likely to fight against the mutineers, but without such pressing reasons as drought, which is beyond human control, as was the case in the 1980s. This time, many of the Arab groups in the region resisted being drawn into such a war; but an array of outcasts would always be likely to assemble for the task.

Flint and de Waal (2005: 41f.), on the other hand, see the main part of the *Janjawid* originating from militant members of the camel herding northern Rizeigat Arabs (historical neighbors to the Zaghawa), and their Arab allies from Chad. During the time of the sultans, the northern Rizeigat were "a headache to the rulers of Darfur" (ibid.) for several reasons. Under British rule, they had been unwilling to be settled in a particular region, and they were too few to qualify for their own leader (*nazir*) but too far away from the *nazir* of the southern Rizeigat, who cooperated closely with the British. When they finally did elect a leader, rivalries prevented his installation – and in the end the northern Rizeigat neither resolved their tribal hierarchies nor were they given ownership over their tribal

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[65] For the difficulty of ending everyday practice of economic structures in 'markets of violence' see Elwert (1999). In September 2006, fighting again flared up between the Chadian government and rebels in eastern Chad, showing that tensions have not eased and war is still more likely than peaceful developments. See "CHAD: Govt and rebels clash in east", IRIN, September 13, 2006.

homeland, a vast pastureland north of Kutum, which would have ended "their centuries-old search for land to call their own" (ibid.: 42).

Of central importance to the organized training and ideological infiltration of today's *Janjawid* was, according to Flint and de Waal, Musa Hilal, son of an old and respected sheikh of the Rizeigat.[66] Expressions of Arab supremacy, which Hilal promotes, originated in the 1980s, more from Libyan infiltration than Khartoum based Arabism (ibid.: 50). During that time, when Ahmed Ibrahim Diraige was governor of Darfur in El-Fasher, a call – in the newly formed 'Arab Gathering' (ibid.: 52, see also Harir 1994) – for Arab rule in Darfur caused severe tensions in the area. The subsequent arming of both Arabs and Fur, through channels from Libya and Chad, culminated later in the violent escalations during the Masalit War, which followed Khartoum's move to put the requests of the 'Arab Gathering' into practice and give Arabs effective political control over large parts of Darfur.

The current war in Darfur bears the typical traces of all so-called ethnic, but actually deeply political, clashes of the recent past, where ethnic, religious or racist ideologies are instrumentalized in confrontations that unleash the worst and indiscriminate atrocities and cruelties towards the civilian population. Typically also, the war in Darfur is getting more and more out of control with all sides neither effectively commanding their own people nor being able to stop large-scale banditry or prevent splinter groups from forming. From the beginning, it was not the rebels and the government cum militias fighting each other. While the rebels started out attacking government military bases, the national army and in particular the militias retaliated against these attacks by indiscriminately assaulting and terrorizing the civilian population. The situation has now seriously deteriorated and humanitarian groups active in the region increasingly report attacks on their personnel by the *Janjawid* as well as the rebels. Not only does it seem as if the rebel leaders are not in control of their followers, but the different rebel factions are also reported to be openly fighting each other. Meanwhile, the Red Cross has reported 'agricultural collapse' for Darfur, describing the situation as worse than during the 1984 famine. Their reports also confirm that the fighting drastically increased again since September 2005. Thus, the social fabric of the border region has come under dramatic strain up to the point where it nearly "ceases to function" (Prunier 2005: 120).

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[66] Musa Hilal, a known Arab supremacist from Darfur, is one of the leaders of the *Janjawid* who has prominently been interviewed. Hilal himself always claimed to have led the Popular Defense Forces to help the government's army in Darfur and thus blurred the fact that the 'devils on horseback', as the *Janjawid* were often called in Western media, merged with both the army and the so-called PDFs. See Wax (2004) at http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/-A58171-2004Jul17?language=printer (last accessed November 1, 2005).

Conclusion

The historical trajectories laid out in this paper reveal, on the one hand, the continuity of regional alliances and oppositions on the Chad/Sudan border, and on the other they demonstrate the ruptures brought about by destructive manifestations of successive governmental regimes of both countries, and Libya, which have resulted in an enduring intensification of violence and warfare. A structure of flexibility that historically characterized the border region was interrupted first by the colonial border and later by the different national influences on the border region. As stated in the beginning, the following will briefly discuss the historical questions and current options for local actors, given the most complex conditions of social variety, land and water scarcity, underdevelopment, destructive political meddling and the ubiquity of firearms.

Historically, concerning the different groups and their strategies in Darfur, Fur and others' opposition to 'outside regimes' were already continuous during the period of Zubayr and later the Mahdiyya at the end of the nineteenth century, while the Zaghawa, at that time, and later various Arab groups, started to build up stronger ties to the central regime, still visible today. The first part of the paper, following Lidwien Kapteijns' (1985) historical account of the border region, showed how in 1888, at a point of overall crisis, different adversarial local groups effectively united against a common enemy – the Mahdist regime under Khalifa Abdullahi, successor to the Mahdi – under the leadership of a young man, Abu Jummayza, with whom they drove off the Mahdist forces together.

Currently, different local groups have united to fight the Sudanese government. Whereas the attacks of the SLA and JEM rebel movements were surprisingly successful in the beginning, their situation today would best be described by what Kapteijns said about the final stages of the historical uprising under Abu Jummayza in 1888: that the differences that historically developed between the members of different groups inside the movements – also related to their ethnic background – seem to be 'too persistent to be permanently suppressed' (Kapteijns 1985: 83). One of the obvious differences today, as compared to the times when a great 'tribal' alliance fought against the Mahdist regime, is that strong allies such as the Darfurian and Wadaian empires do not exist anymore on the regional level and are therefore sought elsewhere.

'Trying to find powerful allies' would be a fitting headline for the current conflict in Darfur, in which the constant negotiating and re-negotiating of who is on who's side seems to be the overarching characteristic. In a landscape with such a variety of rebel groups, militias, governmental forces, and international agencies, strategic alignment and realignment has become a permanent process. In addition to the constant reconfigurations of alliances from amongst the membership of local groups, the new allies of Darfur's rebels and militias can be found in the

various regional diasporas, among individuals within national and international governments, in rebel formations across national borders, among international militaries, and also in the arms trade. Each party to one of these alliances has its own – and often internally conflicting – interests in the events on the ground. This volatility explains why every step towards appeasement complicates the situation.

For example, in the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of May 5, 2006, the one rebel group who originally signed the contract apart from the Sudanese government was the SLA faction of Minni Arkoy Minawi, which had just aligned with the Chadian government of Idriss Déby. Déby himself is extremely interested in pacifying the border region in order to gain control over the rebel alliances that have formed against his own regime. The Sudanese state, on the other hand, signed the peace agreement probably mainly under pressure from the United States, and actually shows no real interest to appease the area (which will most certainly not happen, as long as the government does not attempt to disarm the militia groups). The other faction of the SLA, under Abdel Wahid Mohamed el-Nur, is still divided between aligning with those who signed the agreement, and resisting the agreement, which, to those who did not sign, does not go far enough in its propositions for power and wealth sharing or security issues.[67] JEM is the most vocal in its protest against the agreement, arguing that after so much destruction and so many casualties, the present agreement would be a "selling out" to the government. But the JEM is not only supported internationally by a strong and politically active Zaghawa diaspora; their strongest allies are individual players in both national and regional governments in Chad and Sudan, in the Chadian army, and among interested foreign militaries, such as Eritrea's or Libya's (see Marchal 2005). Likewise, the SLA faction of Abdel Wahid does not have strong allies on either national level, but it is supported by the southern Sudanese SPLM, by Eritrea, and on the ground by large parts of the population of Darfur, to whom the movement feels accountable in the outcome of any effective peace agreement in Abuja.

For peace to come to Darfur, these different lines of support and alliance must open up in order to build mutual trust and create working structures that can facilitate reconciliation. Compromise solutions have been abundant in Darfur since the days of the sultanates,[68] and some reportedly were attempted even while

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[67] The part of the agreement that treats security issues is most contested. While the rebels seek compensation for each individual for losses and a possibility to return "in dignity", the concessions of the government of Sudan seem not to go far enough in this respect (personal communication at Sudan Conference in Hermannsburg, Germany, May 13, 2006).

[68] For traditional or well-established British practices of conflict settlement in Darfur see Sharif Harir (1994), Adam Azzain Mohamed (2004), Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil (2005) or Atta El-Battahani (2005).

the fighting was still intensifying.[69] But as Alex de Waal cautions us: "axiomatic to a negotiated end to a war is that each side comes to terms with its former enemy. Many Darfurians still choke on this. After what they have suffered, it is understandable."[70] Thus, after weighing what has been laid out in this paper – historically and presently – it is clear that a 'coming to terms' has been on the agenda for the people in this border region for a very long time.

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[69] Here I refer to the southern Rizeigat Paramount Chief Saeed Madibu who tried to revive local elites of the former Native Administration in an effort to influence their people towards non-involvement with the government's campaign (Flint and de Waal 2005: 124).

[70] See "SUDAN: Peace deal collapse would be catastrophic for Darfur", IRIN, May 5, 2006.

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