ETHNICITY FROM PERCEPTION TO CAUSE OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS: THE CASE OF THE FUR AND NUBA CONFLICTS IN WESTERN SUDAN

A Contribution to:

CONTICI International Workshop

Bern July 8-11 1997

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London - UK

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

Usually by-products of fresh conflicts, ethnic, cultural and spiritual dichotomies, can invert with the progress of a conflict to become intrinsic causes of that conflict and in the process increase its complexity and reduce the possibility of managing and ultimately resolving and transforming it.

THE INVERSION OF ETHNICITY FROM PERCEPTION TO CAUSE OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS: THE CASE OF THE FUR AND NUBA CONFLICTS IN WESTERN SUDAN

PRELUDE

The complexity and variety of causes, perceptions and manifestations of group violence baffles rational thought. Complex social processes and phenomena, themselves dependent on a multitude of objective and subjective factors do impart uncertainty to the course of violent conflict as well as to our attempts to understand and judge it as actual behaviour of actual people.

On first approximation, violence seems to be an irrational, chaotic behaviour par excellence. It defies the rational and practical principal that in case of dispute over conflicting interests, cooperation is, in the long term, the most rewarding course of action. Yet history is replete with incidents of violence. Violence is irrational but not incomprehensible. We now know that irrationality and chaos do show inherent order that allows us to discern some repetitive patterns and that chance and necessity are indeed woven together. Even in the realm of the social, the inherent inner necessity articulates itself in from of chance. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that in the very complex area of social violence, the objective has not been totally overrun by the subjective and that familiar patterns and similar traits may become discernible.

Thus, we may not be able to fully understand the rationality of social violence at the level of

individuals, but we have a better chance in discerning some of its design and part of its scheme as the collective behaviour of a large number of people.

ETHNICITY

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

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

THE EFFECT OF TIME

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

The passage of time blurs some processes, enforces others and obliterates some altogether. We can only guess what the consequences of today's acts will be, given the number of subjective factors in action and the very real possibility that a subjective factor may invert and become an objective one and vice versa.

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

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

ECOLOGICAL AND ETHNIC BORDERS

Ecological borders are, in many cases, also ethnic and cultural borders. Different ecozones demand different social production systems. In rural Africa, this means different land use systems. In semi-arid zones, the pastoral mode of production is viable and can survive. Over the years, pastoralists

acquire their distinctive cultural and ethnic traits compared, for example, with their neighbouring sedentary peasants. Ecological borders become ethnic and cultural lines of demarcation, where people meet to cooperate or to fight.

These adaptations to variant ecological habitats produce corresponding contrasts in material culture, aspects of social organisation and dress and language - some major ethnic identification criteria. These differences become critical as soon as quarrels arise over the allocation of entitlements in a shared or in a newly occupied resource. As a result, marginal lands are often the flashpoint of much larger structural conflicts between neighbouring groups. As each contender seeks to attract maximum support, ethnicity is the loudest rallying cry. As Markakis note (Fukui & Markakis, 1994), of all ideological weapons used in African warfare - nationalism, socialism, religion and ethnicity - the latter proved by far the more superior as *a principle of political solidarity and mobilisation* as well as a dominant political force (italics author's) (see also Bächler & Böge 1992; Molvaer, 1991). The outcome is that discord over material resources, once clothed in the symbolism of ethnic survival and fuelled by the vicious circle of revenge, can simmer long after the initial resource dispute has been settled.

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

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

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

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

This paper will demonstrate the possibility of the transformation of ethnicity from perception into cause with examples from the armed conflict in northern Darfur between the Fur people of the Jebel Marra and the Zaghawa and other Arab tribes, and of the conflict in the Nuba Mountains between the Nuba people and the alliance of Arab pastoralists, the Jellaba and the central government.

THE CONFLICT IN DARFUR:

FRAGILE ECOLOGY, FRAGILE SOCIAL PEACE

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

The Resource Miners

The slow processes of natural wear and tear on the environment have been accelerated enormously by the unprecedented extraction of natural resources. This is being carried out by members of the northern Sudanese traditional merchant class, known as the Jellaba, prompted by their assimilation into the world market in the restricted role of extractors of primary resources. In addition, loan conditionalities imposed by the World Bank and the IMF have boosted considerably the restructuring of Sudan's resource utilisation away from local needs and the local market towards the demands of the international market.

This has been compounded by a steady decline in international terms of trade, brought about by the collapse of primary commodity prices, which had a knock-on effect on the local market where the terms of trade have also worsened. To maintain their living standards, the peasants and pastoralists have had to produce more from a shrinking resource base. If they fail to do so, they usually have no option but to relocate and join the millions of dispossessed and assetless poor.

Mobility Curtailed

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

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

The Struggle Between Oasis Farmers and Desert Nomads

In an attempt to understand the impact of ecological change in northern Darfur on the state of war and peace in the contemporary history of this region, the most striking observation is that the settled

farmers and the pastoralist nomads are 'causally' interlocked in a complex solidarity/strife relationship with each other. They exercise mutual solidarity in times of normal hardship, but in times of severe hardship, when bodily survival is literally at stake, they engage in violent combat.

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

The Impact of Ecological Scarcity

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

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

The People

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

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

The Arab tribes in Darfur (mainly pastoralist nomads) consist of the Habania, Beni Hussein, Zeiyadiya, Beni Helba, Djawama, Rezeigat, and the Maharia, in addition to the Arab urban merchants and government officials mainly of Jellaba origin. These communities formed what is known as the Arab Congregation in the mid-1980s, an alliance designed to lobby for official and financial backing from both the central government and the national political parties in support of the cause of the Arabs in the region.

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

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

O'Fahey (1980) adopted a different classification. He pointed out that, ethnographically, Darfur is one of the least charted regions of the Sudan, a fact which makes the classifications in terms of the Arab/non-Arab divide rather ambiguous, rendering the genealogical approach unworkable. The structure suggested by O'Fahey relates migration, linguistic and occupational factors in identifying the ethnic structure of Darfur. This paper, however, will adopt a broader approach, one that combines both the genealogical/occupational and the culture-area approach to define ethnicity in Darfur. According to this hybrid approach, three main population groupings can be identified, each sharing a common pedigree, the same occupation as well as the same culture-area.

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

The second group comprises the sedentary farmers and small-scale cultivators. These are rural-based people, mainly non-Arab and predominantly Fur. Traditionally, they did not have, or did not need to have a military organisation, unlike the aforementioned nomadic groups. For these people, Darfur is their God-given homeland and non-Darfurians are but intruders in their region. Although traditionally inclined to peaceful life, the Fur sedentary farmers are often engaged in skirmishes with cattle and camel nomads over animal intrusion in their farms. As a result of these frequent clashes and in spite of economic interdependence and cooperation, both groups harbour a degree of mutual animosity and mistrust.

The third culture area/occupational group consists of traders, government officials, absentee landlords

and urban-based professionals. Unlike the other two groups who have limited political influence, this third group plays an important role in the political life of the region.

The Ethnic Divide, a Product of the Conflict

The enemies confronting each other in this bloody conflict have a long history of guarded cooperation and relative peaceful coexistence. In the past, they exchanged goods and services; indeed some of the herds that the Arab pastoralists reared belonged to wealthy Fur peasants. With the onset of the drought in 1982/85, the Fur sold these herds, depriving the pastoralists of much needed income. The severance of this economic tie has strained the relations between the Fur and the Arabs ever since.

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

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

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

However, with the escalation of the conflict, the ethnic divide began to harden. People became very aware of their ethnic affiliation. Their former party political and religious sect loyalty began to wither away. Instead, people on both sides of the ethnic divide fell back to group solidarity and reciprocity for their physical security.

Fourteen years on, the problem has become more complicated by the fact that people are entrenched in their ethnicity. Indeed, their former perception of the conflict is gradually becoming one of its tangible causes.

The Armed Conflict in the Nuba Mountains

Before the current armed conflict between the Nuba people and their adversaries, the indigenous Arab tribes in alliance with the Jellaba and the central government, began, the notion of one Nuba people was rather arbitrary and vague even to the Nuba themselves. The conflict raised the awareness of the Nuba about their Nuba-ness. It also raised their political awareness. Calamities were usually considered acts of God, but now more people blame the *Hukkuma wa Eltijjar*, the government and the

merchants, for their malaise.

Two hundred years of delicate and precarious cooperation between the local Arab groups and the Nuba has collapsed into bitter and bloody feuds. The ethnic divide now seems permanent.

The People

The term Nuba is often used to refer to the inhabitants of the Nuba Mountains in southern Kordofan. The Nuba number about one-and-a-half million. The various Nuba people make up some 90 per cent of the population of southern Kordofan, while the rest are mainly Hawazma and Messeriya Zurug Arabs, who moved into the mountains from the west and north around 1800. There is also a small, but very influential minority of Arab traders, the so-called *Jellaba*.

The term Nuba refers to *'a bewildering complexity'* of ethnic groups (Nadel, 1947). Stevenson (1984) identified more than 50 languages and dialect clusters, falling into 10 groups. Many authors have argued that the term 'Nuba' was originally an alien label used to group together all peoples living in the hills area who were seen as 'black Africans' as opposed to the Baggara Arabs (Nadel, 1947; Baumann, 1987). When the term has been used by the Nuba to describe themselves, it has not always been consistently applied in portraying who is or is not Nuba (and therefore what distinguishes Nuba from non-Nuba). Nadel (1947) commented:

The people of a certain tribe will describe all similar groups of which they know or with which they come in contact as being their 'race' but would be uncertain into which category to place other groups outside their kin. In the opinion of a Korongo man all the surrounding tribes were Nuba, but not the people of Dilling, whom he believed to be Arab.

Despite the problematic involved in using the term, one can reasonably assume that the contemporary ethnic type presented by the Nuba today was formally widespread in the Sudan but was forced to retreat by incoming Arabs to the mountains where there was adequate water supply and easy defence. As MacMichel (1912) wrote:

In the earliest days and for thousands of subsequent years the ancestors of the Nuba probably held the greater part of this country (i.e. what is now known as Kordofan), except the northern most deserts. Beaten back by other races that ruled the Nile banks in successive generations, by tribes from the interior, and finally by the nomad Arabs, the Nuba have now retired to the mountains of southern Kordofan

In spite of the previous difficulty in using the term Nuba for all non-Arab inhabitants of the mountains, successive calamities have imposed a common destiny upon these peoples and have been conducive to the development of a loose unity and a growing feeling of a common 'Nuba-ness' among them. Their mutual historical experiences of the slave-raids, the Turkish and British invasions, the current conflict and the Jellaba domination as well as the existence of something akin to a common Nuba culture now permit the Nuba and commentators to speak of one Nuba people.

This classification is also justified by the identification of the Nuba by others and the consequent implications of this identification on individual Nuba in relation to others and among themselves. Thus in a sense a common ethnicity has been forced onto these diverse peoples by the actions and definitions of other more powerful groups.

The Nuba identity is, therefore, subjectively defined in comparison with and in contrast to the Baggara Arabs of Kordofan and Darfur regions, and objectively determined by shared fate, shared space, comparable cultural values and similar economic activities.

History of the Nuba People

Having no written language, the distant history of the Nuba peoples has largely been forgotten. As Nadel (1947) noted:

The traditions and memories of the peoples themselves yield sparse information. It often seems as if historical traditions had been cut short by the overpowering experience of the Mahdist regime (1881-1898)

Of all Nuba peoples, those of Tegali have the best historical records because of the strong links they had with the Funj Kingdom of Sennar. However, this information does not go beyond the mid-16th century. Some Nuba intellectuals (Suleiman Rahal, 1993) claim that the Nuba inhabited the area south of Egypt near present Dongola where they established great kingdoms, notably the Meroetic Kingdom, but were forced back by the successive southward penetration of incoming Muslim groups of Arab descent. There is, however, little evidence to support this claim.

The more recent history of the Nuba goes back to the early 16th century at the point when large groups of Juhaina pastoral tribes began to move south-westward into the plains of northern Kordofan, ultimately confining the Nuba to the region now known as the Nuba Mountains. This great movement coincided with the establishment of the Kingdom of Sennar by Umara Dungas around 1504 AD.

In spite of the lack of certainty about their distant past, most authors seem content to assume that the Nuba have lived in the area they now occupy for a very long time. Some of Nadel's informants seem to attest to this. When asked about previous places of settlement the people answered: '*we have always lived here'*. It is also plausible to assume that during most of their recent history, the Nuba have been farmers living mainly on the plains.

The Baggara enter the Mountains

As mentioned before, it was around 1800 that the Baggara tribes, which had previously roamed the plains of Kordofan and Darfur, began to move into the valleys of the Nuba Mountains in search of water and pasture for their growing herds. They divided the plains among themselves and drove the Nuba uphill. A large part of the Nuba area fell to the Hawazma (a Baggara tribe). The advent of the Baggara in the mountains coincided with the beginning of slave raiding in the region.

Driven into the hills, the Nuba turned to terrace farming of the relatively barren hill soil. Gradually barter trade relations began to unite the two communities in a strong reciprocal, albeit asymmetrical, relationship.

Sagar (1922) mentions relations of cooperation which cross-cut the Nuba and Baggara divide. He wrote:

Each sub-tribe of Baggara protected, as far as possible, the hills of its own zone, in retain for supplies of grain and slaves

These local Baggara/Nuba relations had, not infrequently, created intra-Baggara rivalries - when a Baggara sub-tribe defended 'their' Nuba from the machinations of another Baggara group. In some areas, Baggara/Nuba relations were even much closer than the protection agreements indicated, with some Baggara assuming titles and 'posts' in Nuba tribes. Numerous intermarriages were also recorded (Suleiman Rahal, 1993). However, the extent and limits of these crosscutting ties varied greatly from

one area to another.

These sporadic good relations should not obscure the fact that the most conspicuous negative feature of Baggara/Nuba relations was the slave raids by the Baggara upon the harassed Nuba communities.

The Post-independence Period

The independence of Sudan in 1956 accelerated the opening up of the mountains to all winds of change, and catalysed the mobility of the Nuba people into the urban centres of Sudan and farther still to foreign countries. This opening up has also meant that the Nuba Mountains were henceforth open to economic and social intrusion by national and international agents of trade and politics and to cultural exchange.

Going out to meet the world also meant coming home to understand ones own identity. Many Nuba discovered their Nuba-ness in the diaspora, in the towns of central Sudan, where the others reduced their cultural diversity to a single all-overriding Nuba identity.

The prevalent attitude of the Jellaba and most middle-class professionals and intellectuals towards the Nuba has always been racially motivated. This arrogant stand of most Arab northerners towards non-Arab southerners and westerners was, and is, one important factor in hardening the attitudes of these people against all northern-dominated regimes in Khartoum.

The Conflict

In the past, problems arising from land and water disputes were resolved at an annual conference of Nuba Mekks and Arab Sheikhs. These meetings usually took place on neutral ground, both sides abided by the agreements reached, and the Nuba Mountains enjoyed decades of peace and relative prosperity. In recent years, however, the drought has pushed the Arab nomads deep into Nuba territory, sometimes even before the harvest was collected. This has resulted in clashes between Nuba farmers and Arab pastoralists. On the other hand, more land fell into the hands of absentee landlords, mainly Arab Jellaba. Out of 200 mechanised farms supported by the State Agricultural Bank in the Habila area, only four were allocated to local cooperatives, one was leased to a group of Habila merchants, four to individual local merchants and the rest (191) were leased to absentee landlords, mainly rich Jellaba, government officials and retired generals from the North. (Suleiman Rahal,1993)

The scissors effect of the advance of the nomads into the mountains on the one hand, and the encroachment of mechanised farming on the other, alerted the Nuba people to the possibility of being squeezed out of their best farming lands into marginal and poor territory. That is why when the civil war broke out in the South in 1983, the Nuba were generally sympathetic with the proclaimed aims of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and individual Nuba even moved into liberated areas and joined the movement.

The Response of the Jellaba Government

The response of the ruling Umma Government was highly irresponsible. Without authorisation from the Constituent Assembly, it reorganised the Misiriya militia (a Baggara tribe) into a paramilitary force, the Popular Defence Force (PDF) and by 1988 systematic killing of Nuba civilians by the army, the military intelligence and the PDF had begun. This pattern of violence, elimination by

attrition, became well-established in the following years, which saw the SPLA advance very close to Kadugli town, the administrative centre of the Nuba Mountains. In April of the same year, units of the SPLA infiltrated Tuleishi in the western hills. Not all Nuba were aware of the long-term political goals of the SPLM, nor have they rushed en mass to join The SPLA., While the attacks by the army and the PDF increased in frequency and ferocity, the non-cooperating civilians were left to suffer between the rock and the hard place.

There was no respite for the Nuba people with the new regime of the National Islamic Front (NIF). In October 1989, the NIF regime promulgated the Popular Defence Act, which in effect legitimised the Murahaliin militia (Baggara militia). Africa Watch (1992) documented an upsurge in violence since the middle of 1991 against Nuba civilians by the army and the military intelligence, the main targets appear to have been young educated Nuba men. Some Nuba believe that the army has drawn up lists of all educated people, whom it planned to kill

In 1992, massive human rights violations were recorded against the Nuba people. The Kordofan State Government declared a 'Jihad' or Holy War to implement a 'final solution' to the 'Nuba problem'! Consequently, the burning of villages and the disappearance of civilians and a large-scale plan of forcible relocation was begun. Tens of thousands of Nuba are currently scattered in small camps all over northern Kordofan. Many other thousands have been taken hundreds of miles away from home and abandoned there. The scale of the killings and forced relocation permits one to speak of genocide against the Nuba people.

First-lieutenant Khalid Abdel Karim Salih, who was in charge of security in Kordofan State, and who was a personal bodyguard to the Governor of Kordofan (who is also his brother) from May 1992 to February 1993 gave a statement in a press conference on October 1993 in Bern, Switzerland. In his detailed statement, Mr Salih estimated that during a seven months period the army and the PDF killed some 60,000 to 70,000 Nuba. He stressed that these ethnic-cleansing operations had made no distinction between Muslims and Christians or Churches and mosques. Missionary centres and Quranic schools were all indiscriminately shelled. (Voice, 1993)

The Causes

In all three major conflicts now raging in the Sudan three causes predominate. The undeclared interests of the aggressors vary from sheer greed (war in the South) to sheer need (war in Darfur) to a combination of greed and need (war in the Nuba Mountains). In all cases, the aggressor is moving out of an ecologically poorer to a richer ecozone, what we earlier described as the desert versus the oasis syndrome (Suliman & Osman, 1994). Three causes predominate all major violent conflicts in the Sudan:

1. Resource depletion because of unsustainable land use and denying people access to resources and allocating the best lands to absentee landlords for large-scale rain-fed mechanised agriculture
2. Climate variations in the form of persistent drought, which forced large numbers of
3. pastoralists to enter wetter areas, for example, Jebel Marra and the Nuba Mountains
4. Concentration of human and animal populations in marginal lands which creates increasing pressure on land and water resources in societies of little economic differentiation

Resource Depletion

Resource depletion in the North is behind the civil war in the South and in the Nuba Mountains. The Jellaba are seeking to open new 'virgin' land and water and oil resources in these areas to replenish the large tracts of land lost to large-scale mechanised farming in the North. The search for new land promoted large-scale rain-fed agriculture to move into the Anggessena region, south of the Blue Nile Province and into the Nuba Mountains. Sheer greed is the driving force behind the devastating wars (Suliman, 1993).

Against Mechanised farming in the Nuba Mountains: A Witness Testimony

The mechanised farming problem has two ways of taking our land: the government planned mechanised farming schemes, which are given from Khartoum from the Ministry of Agriculture regardless of the reality of the area. Land is just allotted to certain people, who are mainly retired army generals or civil servants, or wealthy merchants from northern Sudan or local Jellaba who have been living in the area for a long time and here accumulated wealth. They have links with Khartoum and the central Sudanese government, because they originally come from the North. These people acquire land and then go and tell their relatives that they too can acquire land through the ministry. They join forces together and acquire more land.

Because the Nuba are not wealthy only a small number of them are involved in this distribution of land. The government just demarcates land regardless of the realities of the area. They do not care if there are villages in this land or not. In the area of Habila mechanised farms have circled many villages. There is no more land for the Nuba, no land for farming and no land for the animals to graze. What happens is that the Nuba are squeezed and have to choose between two options: either to leave the area to work for the government as soldiers, or become workers in a mechanised farming scheme. This phenomenon is becoming massive.

Besides the planned mechanised farms, there is the unplanned land acquisition. Here you have somebody who is powerful and wealthy, who just comes in and cleans up a piece of land which is actually owned by the community. But because he is powerful he just cleans it and brings in his tractors and his workers and begins to farm. And then, if any resistance happens, he will go to the authorities to protest and ask them to protect him. Because he can bribe the authorities, he can pay and do whatever he likes. Otherwise, he has a politician friend, or an army officer, who is powerful and can send an order down here, so his friend can get the land. There are also other ways of getting land, for example burning down a village and forcing its inhabitants to move on.

You can find no intention of keeping some of the land for the Nuba. The land is either taken by the Arab nomads for grazing, or taken by the wealthy landlords who come from the North. What remains for the Nuba is to fight back against these things. The Nuba have to find a way to protect themselves. They have already started to create their own political organisations or activate old ones.

(From an interview with a leading Nuba professional, who cannot be named)

Climate Variations

Coupled with large increases in human and livestock populations, drought is the major cause of war in Darfur, where the pastoralist Arab nomads are seeking permanent shelter in Jebel Marra having endured many years of an almost continuous drought. In this case, the sheer need to survive is the prime motive behind the war between the Arab nomads and the Fur settled farmers in northern Darfur.

In the case of the Nuba Mountains, however, a combination of interests is encountered, namely those of the Jellaba in securing new land for their mechanised farming schemes and the need of the Arab pastoralist nomads to find shelter for themselves and their animals in the richer ecozone of the Nuba Mountains.

This overlap of interests between the Jellaba and the Arab pastoralists explains the temporary alliance forged between the two groups. Both are trying to dislodge the indigenous people and take over their land. It remains to be seen whether this marriage of convenience can endure the conflicting interests of its partners, all seeking to eat the same cake. There are already signs that the powerful Jellaba will use the Arab pastoralists to secure their objectives in the region and then deny them access to the best lands.

Conflict Resolution

Since its inception in 1956, the Sudanese State has always been a Jellaba state and so government troops have always been fighting the Jellaba wars by proxy. It is also interesting to note that attempts at conflict resolution in the South and the West have almost entirely been focusing on sharing of political power, the issue most relevant to the power elite on both sides of the conflict divide. Sharing political power in the Addis Ababa Accord (1972), for example left the economic status quo in tact, a state of affairs most welcome to its beneficiaries, the Jellaba elite.

Given the complex triangular relationships between the Nuba, the Jellaba and the Arab pastoralists, two independent approaches to conflict management and resolution can be postulated. The first approach concerns the relationship between the Nuba and the Jellaba: the only way to resolve this conflict is to stop the incursion of large-scale mechanised farming into the Nuba Mountains and retain all stolen lands to their original owners, the Nuba people.

As to the relationship between the Nuba and pastoralist Arabs, the acceptance of temporary, equitable sharing of the use of the available resources, mainly land and water, is advised. This should not be a difficult proposal to implement, since the Nuba and the Arab groups had working agreements in the past, which the Arabs ceased to honour.

It is in the long-term interest of both the Nuba and the local Arab groups to go back to cooperation and abandon confrontation. Strongly recommended is the so-called 'Borana Solution', which demands from the Arabs to recognise the right of the Nuba over their land and from the Nuba to recognise the right of the Arabs and their livestock for survival.

These two different approaches to the two partners in war against the Nuba, namely the Jellaba and the Baggara, constitute the point of departure that can lead to peace. The Arab groups should understand that they are being used by the Jellaba and the government to facilitate their plans, namely to relocate the Nuba and take over their land for the expansion of mechanised farming.

It is important to this proposal that all so-called development activities that further exacerbate the ecological malaise of the region should be halted and that only those that contribute to the rehabilitation of the renewable resource base should be allowed to proceed. It is time to use development projects to further the cause of peace, rather than allow them to become catalysts of social turbulence and conflict.

In summary, peace is possible in the Nuba Mountains. Peace-making efforts should be geared at stopping the greed and catering for the need, in other words, rolling back mechanised farming in the region on the one hand, and regaining and developing the cooperation that once existed between the Nuba and their neighbouring pastoralist Arab groups on the other.

In a recent interview with Yusef Kuwa Mekki, Commander of the SPLA forces in the Nuba Mountains, (April 1997), he informed the author that a peace agreement has been concluded in 1993 between the Nuba leadership and the Arab tribes, which is still holding. He also wrote earlier to me commenting on the peace agreement, which we advised both sides to work for. The following is an excerpt from correspondence with commander Kuwa in February 1996:

I have some news that will interest you. I am conveying this news to you because I know how concerned you are about the relationship between the Arabs and the Nuba. We have always been concerned, right from the beginning, about this relationship and we wrote to them several times asking them to be neutral, if not joining us. But at that time and because of the machinations of the Umma Party and various central governments, they did not listen to us. Now that they have lost so many people and animals, they understand they have been used by the governments of Khartoum. With this understanding we were able to sign a peace agreement with them and things are going well now

The peace agreement between the Nuba and the local Arab groups is still holding!

Conclusion

Before the onset of the violent conflict in the Nuba Mountains, the diverse Nuba people were fully aware only of their clan affiliations. They neither actively sought to be nor were they conscious of being a Nuba nation. Their relations with their Arab neighbours, the Hawazma and Messeriya, were tolerable. They exchanged goods and services, and intermarriage was an acceptable practice especially among Arabs and Muslim Nuba. At the beginning of the conflict, many Nuba even sided with the government, because they perceived the conflict to be a political discord, rather than an ethnic and economic strife.

Along with other aforementioned factors, the war has been crucial in bringing out and solidifying the awareness of the Nuba peoples as belonging to a larger ethnic group, a united and quasi homogeneous Nuba people. The result is that the conflict is increasingly being perceived by most Nuba to be an ethnic conflict. While this process is still going on, a concurrent one has been initiated, namely, the growing conviction, especially among educated Nuba, that the war is all about ethnicity, with the Arab government practising genocide against the Nuba people. There is now a core of angry Nuba, who believe that all Arabs should be thrown out of the Nuba land in a final and radical solution! For this group, ethnicity has already crossed the threshold from perception to cause of violent conflict. And the longer the war continues the greater the probability that more Nuba people will join the ranks of those who fight for the ethnic cause.

As to Darfur prior to the mid-1980s, conflicts in northern Darfur were infrequent, highly localised and of low intensity. Arab pastoralists were allowed into Jebel Marra after the harvest was collected and usually stayed there until the first rains in April or May. Indeed, some of their livestock belonged to rich Fur peasants. Ethnic barriers were low and easily surmountable. All people inhabiting the area were Sunni Muslims with Arabic as their lingua franca. The prolonged drought dealt a severe blow to the tradition and spirit of cooperation and tolerance between herders and peasants in the region. Fuelled by the neighbouring conflict between Chad and Libya and the influx of modern weapons, skirmishes turned into large-scale armed conflict. On both sides of the conflict divide, people fell back to their time honoured, traditional group solidarity and reciprocity. The barrier between the Fur and their erstwhile good neighbours began to grow. People found solace in entrenchment within their ethnic and cultural niche. The conflict was widely perceived as ethnic/tribal. Party political affiliations, which ran across ethnic and geographical borders, began to collapse. Ethnic brotherhood became paramount and the conflict was seen by all as an ethnic strife.

Fourteen years later, the transformation of the perception of the conflict into an unshaken conviction about the true nature of the conflict is proceeding fast. The ethnic divide already constitutes, for good or for evil, a formidable social force in northern Darfur. Without a comprehensive solution to the

protracted conflict, that also restores the economic and social fabric of the region, renews cooperation between the two factions and opens new vistas for economic and social development, the spreading malaise of ethnic hostility will continue to grow. In its wake, efforts at conflict resolution will be hampered and the palpable presence of ethnic hostility will indeed constitute a concrete and tangible cause of future violent confrontations.

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

Usually by-products of fresh conflicts, ethnic, cultural and spiritual dichotomies, can invert with the progress of a conflict to become intrinsic causes of that conflict and in the process increase its complexity and reduce the possibility of managing and ultimately resolving and transforming it.

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