The Darfur War, Gender, and the Contingency of Sudanese Citizenship

Since February 2003[1] Darfur has been the site of mounting violence, which has led the UN to describe the conflict as currently 'the world's worst humanitarian crisis' The U.S. Congress even labelled the conflict 'genocide'. Diverse ethnic groups as well as the government were engaged in violence in the 1980s and 90s. However, violence has reached a new dimension in the recent war, where racism has become the main legitimising discourse of the conflict.

In this short sketch I will try to understand the current 'crisis'[2] in Darfur from the perspective of gendered identities and the contingency of Sudanese citizenship. I feel hesitant to say anything definitive on the nature or sources of the current Darfur war. In the first place because as an anthropologist I base myself on what people in a certain location say and do. I have not been able to talk to people in Darfur since this war erupted in early 2000. I also find it hard to see the conflict in terms of an underlying all-overriding aspect or aspects, which could explain the crisis.

Here, I will attempt to look at the war from the perspective of the issue of intersecting identities. This is not to neglect economic, social, cultural, political, or other forms of marginalization of Darfur within the Sudanese nation state as important factors in the conflict. On the contrary, I think these are of major relevance for the scale and frequency of the violence.[3] At the same time since 'ethnicity', or even 'race', has become the major label with which the violence has been referred to, often in a context of exoticizing the conflict, I want to look at the problem from the perspective of identity construction.

In order to do this I will first give a brief outline of the war in Darfur. Next I will try and place the recent events in Darfur in the context of the project of the Sudanese nation state to construct a national Sudanese identity, by relating these to

---

[1] This was the date that a group calling themselves the 'Darfur Liberation Front' officially claimed the attack on Golo, the disctrict headquarters of Jebel Marra. Political as well as armed resistance against the government had been building for a longer period in Darfur, however. Flint and de Waal for example, refer to 21 July 2001 as an important date for the start of organized resistance, when 'rebels' attacked a police station in Golo (2005:76). See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darfur_conflict

[2] I think that rather than a crisis, the conflict can be better termed a war. I put therefore quotation marks to indicate this problem. At the same time I want to retain the label conflict to indicate that it has a longer history than three years.

[3] Some critical scholars, such as Ali Dinar, even state that the watershed that the war is thought to represent is exaggerated as violence, poverty, and the neglect by the government are symptomatic for Darfur. In this respect I agree with him. Here I will argue, however, that the way the violence has been legitimized does make a difference however (thanks to Ali Dinar for his critical remarks on a paper I presented at the 25th anniversary of the Sudan Studies Association, Bergen, Norway, 6-8 April 2006.

the way the Islamist government in Sudan has positioned the Darfur population since coming to power in 1989. I will argue that this positioning as well as the current war in Darfur fit into a pattern, which connects Muslim masculinity to the articulation of a Sudanese citizenship.

Some background to the 'Darfur Crisis'

The war in Darfur has attracted ample media attention as well as international political concern. In general the current conflict has been cast as a conflict between 'Sudanese Arab nomads' and 'Black African farmers'. This dichotomy has been contested in both popular and academic publications. Particularly problematic in using ethnicity as shorthand for, if not the main denominator of the conflict is not only that it leads to an oversimplification of the causes of the current war. I think that if the ethnic labels, which are used in the Darfur war are not qualified, the users of these labels are complicit in the discourse the current Islamist government of Sudan uses to legitimize this civil war.

There are several arguments that allow for deconstructing the binary opposition, which seems so self-evidently to constitute the basis of the current conflict in Darfur. One of them is to point out that ethnic identity is not fixed, homogeneous or self-evident, but rather flexible, fluid and context bound. Another is to understand ethnicity as an aspect of the social, economic, political and cultural contexts in which it is put forward as an important marker of identity.[4] In this paper I will focus on the second strategy. I will therefore only briefly outline some of the arguments put forward to indicate the flexibility of ethnicity. The overview is scant and by no means an attempt to be exhaustive, nor is it meant to give a neat chronology of events.

The construction of the conflict as one of 'Arab Muslim nomads' against 'Black African farmers' glosses over the fact that the parties involved are all Muslims who are linked with each other by a history of exchange, intermarriage, and even lifestyle. Already in 1969 Haaland described how the shift from farming to nomadism by fortunate Fur farmers also meant a shift from a Fur to a Baggara identity: the so-called *Fur al-Baggara* as De Waal refers to them (1989:50). Although the newcomer

[4] Again, I consider identity not as a property of a person, but as performative and thus contingent, ambiguous and transformative (cf. Butler 1990a:70-90; also Alsop et. al. 2003:103).

was not readily accepted as 'one of us' by the Baggara, the reason they gave Haaland for this was the lack of respect shown to visitors by not keeping to the cultural codes of hospitality (i.e. offering tea and food) and not the act of taking up nomadism in itself (Haaland 1972: 49-172; see also1969). The reverse was also true: whenever a person settled among sedentary farmers, the granting of land by the community leader meant that one could become part of that community within one generation (cf. De Waal 1989:48-49). The relation between ethnic identity, location, livelihood, and land dates back to an even further removed past, when the Muslim sultanate was founded. Being 'Fur' meant that one lived within the boundaries of the Fur Sultanate ruled and protected by a Fur Sultan who, since the 17th century, adhered to Islam. A full subject of the sultanate therefore would also be a Muslim, and would accept the rights and duties, which came with belonging to a certain locality. An ethnic identity thus represented 'citizenship' (cf. De Waal 1989:48).[5]

National and regional politics have been an important cause of the solidification of ethnic identities in the more recent past. Also the colonial government used ethnicity as a means to 'divide and rule' by literally dividing the former Fur sultanate into more or less fixed '*dar*s', administrative areas under the control of appointed tribal leaders under the 'Native Administration' system set up in the 1920s. This division led to clearly demarcated 'homelands' related to fixed ethnic identities which was expressed in the names of these tribal areas, like 'Dar Zaghawa,' while some of the nomadic Arab groups did not receive a 'homeland' of their own, particularly in North-Darfur. Although the tribal leaders never lost complete power, in 1994 the native administration council was 'reinvented' under the new Islamist military government in order to govern the area via local leaders 'on the cheap (De Waal 2004:4)[6] ': their re-established power over land-allocations directly led to renewed conflicts in the far west of Darfur (De Waal 2004, Flint and de Waal 2005:12-13, 58-59, Harir 2004).

I do not want to suggest that ethnicity in the 17th century has remained unaltered in the last centuries; nor that there are strict analogies between 'being a Fur' in the period that the Fur Sultanate was founded, in the colonial era, and the experiences of those who consider themselves to be Fur by the end of the 20th century

[5] Those who did not want to acknowledge the Fur sultan, nor Islam as their religion were forced to move south, out of the sultanate; in due time some of them became 'Fertit'; see O'Fahey 1982.
[6] See Alex de Waal, "Counter-insurgency on the Cheap," *London Review of Books,* August 5, 2004, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n15/waal01.html>.

(cf. Johnson 2003:4). On the contrary, ethnic identity can not be taken as an identity in and of itself as it has historically been intersected with other identifications such as religion, location, means of survival etc, shifting meaning in changing socio-economic and political contexts. My brief outline is meant to caution that one should be clear about the context in which ethnicity is given meaning and look for other important identities that intersect with ethnicity. As the late Claude Aké remarked 'ethnic groups do not exist'[7], referring to the fact that ethnicity only makes sense when analyzed as intersected with other social, economic, political and cultural identities. Considering a saying from the people of Dor in Northern Darfur, as quoted by Flint and De Waal: 'conflict defines origins (2005:7)', I would maintain that it is the nature of the conflict that is of importance for understanding how ethnicity is articulated and validated as well as how these meanings were historically and locationally constructed (cf. Idris 2001:57).

An important context is the ongoing desertification in the post-colonial era. Camel nomads and semi-nomadic groups who had been allotted 'dars' by the colonial government in the far north of Darfur, or none at all, suffered most from the deteriorating environmental conditions. In particular since the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s they would more frequently and earlier in the season come down from the desert in the North with their camels that trampled, ate, or otherwise destroyed the not yet harvested crops of the local farmers and threatened to deplete the local water resources.

In addition, recent politics have solidified ethnic identities even more. In 1981 Darfur was the last region to get a governor from the same area he was to rule under the 1972 Regional Autonomy Act. However, the installation of Ahmed Ibrahim Draige, a Fur, as governor turned out to be a bone of contention. Intellectuals claiming Arab descent organized themselves in the Arab Congregation. As a consequence raids by Arab *fursan* (knights) and Fur *malishat* (militia) were quite un-problematically cast as an ethnic conflict waged between the 'Arab belt' versus the 'African belt'. The Fur felt that the Arabs aimed at destroying their ancestral rights to the land, while Arabs claimed that Fur threatened to oust them under the slogan 'Darfur for the Fur'. The influx of high-tech weapons in the same period due to the

[7] Professor Claude Aké stated this in an hour-long television interview in the series 'in my father's house' hosted by the anthropologist Anil Ramdas. He pointed out that it is theoretically problematic to think 'ethnic groups' or 'ethnic conflict' and that in situations where ethnic consciousness is called upon, issues of power and survival are at stake. See also his 'What is the problem with ethnicity in Africa'?

war between Libya and Chad, the donations of arms by diverse political parties to their respective constituencies during and after the democratic elections, and the arming of militia by consecutive national governments has fuelled this conflict (cf. Flint and the Waal 2005; Harir 1994:160-184).

In 2003 the Opposition Forces constituted by the SLM/A (the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement, formerly the Darfur Liberation Front, led by Abdel Wahid Mohammed Al-Nur) together with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM, led by Khalil Ibrahim, a former member of the National Islamic Front) attacked government forces and installations.[8]. Though the SLM/A and JEM were not indigenous to Darfur they justified their cause by accusing the government of neglecting the huge economic problems in Darfur while doing nothing about the increasing insecurity and lawlessness related to the continuous influx of high-tech arms into the region. They thereby referred to a book handed out mainly in Khartoum in May 2000 entitled, *The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in the Sudan* in which a group calling themselves 'The seekers of truth and justice', who would later found the JEM, had formulated their grievances about the socio-economic and political marginalization of Darfur (cf. Flint and de Waal 2005:17-18).

Since members of the Fur and the Masalit, both predominantly sedentary farmers, and the Zaghawa, semi-nomads, have become involved in this rebel movement they have been cast collectively as 'Black African farmers', *black* suggesting the status of a slave and automatically of a non-Muslim. These so-called 'non-Muslims' have become opposed to the so-called Janjawiid, the other party in the conflict in Darfur, who are usually characterized as Muslim 'Arab' nomads. They are seen as the perpetrators of the violence enacted upon the sedentary population, supported by Sudanese soldiers and the Sudanese Air Force and provided with arms by the Sudanese government operating with total impunity.

Darfur: Local youth, arms, and the construction of a social self[9]

[8] The SLM is considered to be associated with the Fur and Masalit, while the JEM is associated with the Zaghawa of northern Darfur.

[9] Parts of this section appeared as "Darfur in War. The Politicisation of Ethnic Identities?" *ISIM Review* 15, Spring (2005): 14-15.

The government was caught by surprise. As it distrusted its own army which largely consisted of soldiers of Darfur origin, its response was to mount a campaign of aerial bombardment supporting ground attacks by an Arab militia. This militia, the Janjawiid, was recruited from local tribes and armed by the government.
The label Janjawiid, used to refer to the Arab nomadic militia, has been dissected into 'evil' (jaan) 'horsemen' (jawid), or even devils (jiin) riding horses carrying *jim*, Arabic for GM-3 rifles. However, prior to the recent conflict, the term was used more generally to refer to 'rabble', 'hordes', or 'outlaws', in particular in cases of banditry and camel theft committed predominantly by young men.[10] It is this reference to young men that is crucial to my argument.

In the early 1990's, when I conducted anthropological research in Kebkabiya, a town that has been recently under heavy siege, conflicts over scarce resources such as land and water concerned predominantly Fur and Zaghawa groups that have now become allies in the Opposition Forces. The failure of traditional negotiation and peacekeeping mechanisms, such as tribal reconciliation conferences—the last large conference was held to settle a war between Fur and Arabs in 1989, but to no avail—proved to be not only due to the politicisation of ethnic identities or the unwillingness of the government to enforce the treaty. Of importance as well was the discontent within ethnic groups.

Young males increasingly contested the authority of tribal leaders, and elderly men in general. For example, during my stay in Kebkabiya in 1991, one of the Zaghawa representatives who had attended a reconciliation conference inside the town of Kebkabiya was ambushed when returning home. It turned out he was killed by youngsters of his own constituency as they felt their rights were thwarted and their needs neglected by the agreement he had signed.[11]

The general neglect of Darfur in national development plans left youngsters with few possibilities for establishing themselves as head of a family and thus of becoming a 'man' in socio-cultural terms. They had difficulties paying for the bride-price and wedding arrangements that mark maturity and social status. Even when they did marry, young nomads were hardly able to provide for their families as nomads. For their part, many young sedentary farmers had to migrate to towns for some

[10] Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim 'Janjaweed: What's in a name', *Sudan Studies Association Newsletter* 24, 2 (2004):15. Flint and de Waal 2005: 38, 55). Also via personal communication with Ali bin Ali Dinar, November 2004, The Hague.
[11] Information from a talk with one of the Zaghawa negotiators present at this conference.

extended period of time in order to earn the money necessary to raise a family. Moreover, despite the high expectations placed on education, educated young men, even when employed as white-collar workers, barely had the means and ability to provide for their families (Harir 1994: 170; Willemse 2005).

In most farming communities in Darfur, women are the main cultivators while single young men are often redundant. Formerly they would wander, sometimes from the age of eight, from one *Qur'an*ic school to the next, or engage in odd jobs in order to survive. In times of drought, young men would be the first to migrate out of the community in order to fend for themselves, followed by married men, while women, children and the elderly would only leave when cultivation was no longer possible: women were *de facto* 'keepers of the land' despite the fact that entitlement and landownership was a male affair (see also Barth 1972; Grawert 1992, 1998).

Among nomadic groups single young men were most important for herding camels. In times of drought only young men would tend to the smaller herds, temporarily leaving behind women, children, and the elderly in small settlements near sedentary peoples. This process of settling by female nomads coupled with male out-migration among sedentary farmers has created communities that consist of predominantly female-headed households, of both sedentary and nomadic backgrounds. These engage with increasing frequency and scale in interethnic exchange, sharecropping and intermarriage. Although there are 'no true nomads in Darfur' as 'most of the people who are described as such are in fact semi-nomadic or transhumant (De Waal 1989:50)' even the semi-nomadic lifestyle is increasingly difficult to maintain. The temporary nomadic settlements have become more permanent and, moreover, now host an increasing number of young male nomads, which might mean that the nomadic lifestyle has even become extinct. The result of this radical change is insecurity and anxiety among the settled nomadic communities. Moreover, in order to survive, the new settlers needed access to land, water, labour, money and knowledge, thus competing more directly over exactly the same resources that sedentary farmers used in these transition zones (cf. Flint and de Waal 2005:46-48). These happened also to be the areas where most of the outbursts of violence have taken place.[12]

[12] Even more remarkable is that there seems to be a pattern that the most violent killings have taken place between neighbouring communities, in other words, between those who knew each other (personal communication Human Rights Watch).

In these deteriorating conditions of deprivation and despair among nomadic and sedentary young men 'without a future', weapons form an easy and immediate satisfaction in the quest for respect, self-identity, and a sense of control. Due to the high presence of young disenfranchised men on both sides of the conflict, it has taken on an especially troubling gender dimension**.** Women are systematically verbally and physically abused, raped, mutilated, their relatives killed in front of their eyes, while young men of 'battle age' are targets for mass killings. This so-called 'gendercide'[13] is part of many recent so-called ethnic conflicts in Africa and elsewhere.[14]

The illusion of ethnic homogeneity of the Janjawiid has become part of the political-ideological project of those who cast themselves as the 'Arabs' in Darfur. Though it is not clear whether the Janjawiid were indeed as ethnically homogeneous as has been claimed, and there are even some indications that originally the militia included young men from diverse ethnic backgrounds, this ideology has become the mainstay of a regional discourse of ethnic and religious superiority.[15] However, even these 'Arabs' are composed of a diversity of groups with different backgrounds, like those formerly serving in the Sudanese Popular Defence Forces in Dar Masalit who, in turn, had been trained by the *Quwait al Islam*, a militia under the control of the Northern Sudanese General Dabi in South Kordofan; recently migrated 'Arabs' from Chad and Libya; and Abbala and Baggara 'Arabs' from Darfur, who are constructed as the descendants of the Qureish, the ethnic group of Prophet Mohammed, and who migrated in the past from the Arabian Peninsula looking for 'new pastures'.[16] Musa Hilal, who is seen as one of the main new 'Arab' warlords directing the Janjawiid, claims he is waging a 'holy war' under the direction of the Sudanese government (cf. Flint and de Waal 2005:33-65; Harir 1994:161).

The strategy of turning Arab nomads into a militia is, however, not novel: it was applied by consecutive regimes in the civil war with southern Sudan. Both the democratic regime (1985-89) under the leadership of Sadiq Al-Mahdi, and the current

---

[13] Gendercide Watch (www.gendercide.org).

[14] In Darfur, where ethnic affiliation is traced patrilineally, intermarriage results in women begetting children of a different ethnic background than their own. This means that the involvement of women in ethnic politics differs from those of men who have a more unified ethnic identity. Even in ethnically more homogenous communities women and children of diverse ethnicities have in fact been caught similarly in the crossfire between rebels, government, and bandits.

[15] Despite the fact that Musa Hilal, the leader of the Janjawiid claims these consist of only Arabs and that 'Africans' were not allowed to become members (see for example Flint and de Waal 2005:33-65), interviews with some 'defected' Janjawiid seem to contradict this statement.

[16] Interestingly, there are also Arab nomads who refused to join this 'Arab Gathering, or Congregation', for example the Bagarra Rizeigat under Saeed Mahmoud Ibrahim Musa Madibu (Flint and de Waal 2005:122-125).

Islamist regime, armed Arab nomads from Kordofan and Darfur and turned them into so-called *murahiliin* (Johnson 2003:170). The recent deployment of similar counter-insurgency tactics in Darfur suggests that the conflict represents a 'southern Sudan speeded up' rather than a new 'Rwanda in slow motion'.[17] Although the Sudanese government denied allegations of supporting the Janjawiid militia - calling them 'thieves and gangsters'- the conflict in Darfur has thus become part of national politics and thereby it has been burdened with a new political meaning.[18]

Apart from fighting techniques and the application of a 'scorched-earth' policy, the ethnic rhetoric used to justify the violence also bears similarities with the war in the south. This suggests that the current religious-racial discourse of Islamic superiority used in the war in Darfur is part of an ongoing national 'project' of in-and exclusion. Moreover, although the Sudanese Arab government-elite from Central Sudan are affiliated to the Arab nomads in the current war in Darfur, the meaning of 'Arab' to denote each of this group carries different connotations of class and culture. The notion of 'Arab' that is used for the nomadic peoples in Darfur is used in the sense of Bedouin and indicates backwardness and marginality.[19] Alternatively, the educated Arab elite residing in the Nile Valley has constructed themselves as '*Awlad Arab*' and '*Awlad al-balad'*, children (sons) of Arabs and inheritors of the land. They were instrumental in founding political Arab nationalism and claimed the Sudanese nation-state as theirs. By constructing Sudan both as Islamic and as Arab they excluded not only Southerners, but also other marginal groups of Muslims such as the Fur, the Beja, and the Nubians, respectively in the west, east and north of the country.

So, when the current military regime, backed by the Islamist National Islamic Front, took power in 1989 it proclaimed Darfur the 'least Islamized region after the South', this stigma concerned all Darfurians: nomads and sedentary farmers alike. This ethnicized Islamist ideology has been adjusted, or one could say 'refined' in the recent war in Darfur. I maintain that this ideology is part of a project of differentiation

---

[17] See for example John Ryle, "Disaster in Darfur", *The New York Review of Books*, 12 August 2004, 51, no. 13 (http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17326). See also Flint and de Waal 2005.

[18] Political resistance against the government, however, had been building for a longer period in Darfur. Flint and de Waal for example, refer to 21 July 2001 as an important date for the start of organized resistance (2005:76). See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darfur_conflict.

[19] The Arab nomadic groups that have come from Libya and Chad perceive this difference differently. They claim ancestry with the Qoreish, the nomadic group of the Prophet Mohammed. They see themselves therefore as the 'true custodians of Islam' and therefore entitled to rule Muslim lands. Adherents regard Sudan's riverain elite as 'half-caste' Nubian-Egyptians (Flint and de Waal 2005:53)' and thus not entitled to rule the Sudan. Historically, however, the riverain elite are at the center of political and socio-economic power and thus of notions of Sudanese citizenship. I will return to this issue later.

in order to construct an exclusive notion of 'Sudanese' Muslim citizenship, which is intersected with both ethnic and gender identities. Thereby the notion of multiple masculinities (Connell 1987:183-190) in the sense of hegemonic or dominant and sub-dominant or alternative masculinities- is important as this allows us to think difference among men, as well as women, from diverse social backgrounds, who have differential access to citizenship.[20] In order to place the current war in Darfur in this broader historical, national, context I will try to show that the war is related to the interplay between national identity, ethnicity and gender.

Contested dominant mnasculinity: The case of Darfur

As I have argued in Chapters, 1, 2 and 7, when the Islamists took power in 1989 the government considered that the Sudan was not properly Islamized everywhere, it instigated what it called *al-mashru' al-hadari* or the 'Islamist Civilization Project' (Al-Ahmadi 2003:28). I showed that in general the project focused on the conduct and appearance of women in public; both upper and middle class professional women and female street vendors were targeted specifically in the so-called street cleaning campaigns (Al-Ahmadi 2003:50-52; Willemse f.c. 2006). From chapter 1 and 2 it became clear that in the same period Darfur also constituted one of the targets of its re-Islamization offensive. The population of Darfur were cast as bad and thus lesser Muslims, as inferior and backward by the government. In speeches given by touring *ledgna- sha'abia* or popular committees, some of which I analysed in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, Darfur men in particular were called upon to return to the right way, to control and teach their wives the right Islam, to take responsibility for their families and to become faithful members of the *umma*. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, despite the low status of Darfurians as Muslims, they were at that time considered Muslims who could be redeemed, their ways amended and their souls saved. Despite their low status as Muslim, They were considered as Muslims who might be included into the community of righteous believers once they mended their conduct and became better ('proper') believers. Even though this might never have been a seriously inclusive project of the government, at that time Darfur was discursively constructed as part of the Muslim north, which only needed some re-Islamization in order to become

[20] See for example Connell (1995) Cornwall & Lindisfarne (1994); O'Neill and Hird (2001)

included in the Sudanese Muslim nation state. This discourse of inferiority has changed since early 2000, when the war broke out in Darfur.

In the current discourse the Darfur population are cast not as fellow Muslim's whose ways must be redeemed, but as black non-Islamic enemies who, as non-Arabs, do not have a right to live on Muslim soil. This view is propagated by the Arab Gathering and condoned by the Sudanese government, which is, by extension, thus complicit in this rhetoric. The term black is not novel in Darfur: Fur and Masalati were cast as *zuruj*,[21] black, even before the onset of the current conflict. However, this reference has now a different connotation related to national politics.

The 'Other' and the construction of a Sudanese national identity

In 1823 The Turkiyya established a mercantile economy in Central Sudan which replaced the Sultanic structure of the Funj Sultanate. The emergent urban administrative and mercantile class that had established itself in the Nile Valley in the preceding centuries, used a strict Islamic code of conduct, a specific lifestyle, and their position in the administration and trade as a means of distancing itself as *jellaba* from the local, tribal religious elite. (Kapteijns 1985: 66-7; Spaulding 1985: xviii-xix, 150, 178-198, 238).

When the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium came to power in the Sudan in 1899, the new colonial government made use of this powerful indigenous administrative class to rule the country for them. In the process formal education became part of the range of means with which the new urban administrative elite differentiated themselves from the amorphous 'non-elite other'. In the post-colonial era this formal education coupled with a government position became the hallmark of the new ruling class, which referred to itself as Sudanese, thus claiming to represent a national identity without any ethnic differentiation. However, a citizenship open to all Sudanese subjects was never part of the nationalist project. The Riverain elite used its Nile Valley culture, with its specific history of Islamization and Arabization to legitimize their prerogative of political power, based on its superiority and privilege

[21] *Zurug* literally means 'blue'. The term *aswad* refers to the colour black. During my research *aswad* was only used for referring to non-Muslim slaves. It is therefore of importance to establish which terms are actually used in the war. So far I have no exact information on that.

as '*Awlad al-Balad*', the legitimate sons of the land, and '*Awlad Arab'*, sons of Arabs (Beck 1998:267; Harir 1994:27-33; Johnson 2003:4-7). Thus Islam and its 'twin component, the Arab culture (Bob 1992:125)' became the main aspects of a unifying national identity. This culture-cum-location-cum-class difference subsequently marked the difference between the 'Sudanese' and the 'other non-Sudanese' population. However, there is a paradox in incorporation education, being part of a process of inclusion, into the definition of the national elite based on a strategy of exclusion and this has caused cracks in the surface of the Sudanese national identity.

As I pointed out in Chapter 7, formal education proved to be one of the main avenues of upward mobility. I will here summarize some of the arguments I put forward in Chapter 7, in order to show how the construction of Darfur people as 'black non-Muslims', however implicit, by the Sudanese government, can be seen as part of the same project to focus on the conduct of women in order for the Sudanese government to construct a stable, exclusive, Sudanese Muslim citizenship.

Education created possibilities for upward mobility for men and women from the rural areas outside the Nile Valley. At first, men predominantly migrated to the large towns in Central Sudan. There they would acquire, apart from formal education, also training into the culture of the Riverain elite: to perform a specific elite lifestyle, by means of language, dress codes, mores of hospitality etc.; in short a new code of conduct, of thinking, and of constructing themselves as a person. New members of the educated elite thereby had to engage in a process of de-tribalization in order to attain this new status as 'Sudanese' nationals. This process of Sudanization was curbed by the liberal educational policy under Numeiri in the 1970s as this policy has produced an enormous number of young 'insufficiently de-tribalized' men as they can now get an education closer to home with less training in the culture of the Nile Valley elite. In chapter 7 it became clear that these young men came from the countryside with their diplomas with high hopes of obtaining a position in the government. Even if they did get a position, the wages were so low that these young men were not able to live up to ideal-typical notion of Muslim masculinity that the Islamist government they were to represent, had created: as head of households taking care of his family with a particular lifestyle.

In addition, the economic crisis stimulated the new generation of elite members also to keep in contact with their family in local areas, even after they had entered the government service, in order to enhance the chances for survival. So the educated

elite grew in numbers, but thereby lost its control over its 'core culture' as it had to admit men and women as members who retained characteristics of 'other', non-elite, classes and this went against the construction of a Sudanese national identity that was expected in order to escape parochial identities.

In other words, recent processes of economic, social and cultural change led to a contestation of the dominant Sudanese identity and its middle class notion of the ideal family from within its own ranks. Though the national ruling elite had to construct boundaries to differentiate themselves from the 'non-elite' in order to safeguard its privileged position, it was this heterogeneity within the elite itself that posed the largest threat to the moral and political dominance of the government. Young middle class members of the administrative elite had not been 'properly Sudanized'.

One means of re-establishing ones' identity and boundary as an elite is to focus on women, as I analysed in Chapter 7:

> '[N]ationality and citizenship, like race and ethnicity, are unstable categories and contested identities. They are all gendered identities and the construction of 'women', inside and outside their borders, are part of the processes of identity formation (Pettman 1996, quoted in Wilford 1998:16).'

In the Islamist state of Sudan women, indeed have become one of the markers of the boundaries of the Sudanese Muslims self. This boundary is important because notions of a national identity are necessarily ambiguous, vague and continuously changing as it has to incorporate many diverse peoples who have to believe the illusion they are all equal citizens within the same nation-state. The construction of a unifying national identity thus rests not so much on a common core, but needs a common 'other' against whom to define itself.

A national identity is related to a notion of a dominant masculinity: as this dominant masculinity has hardly got a well-defined core identity it also depends on the existence of the category of 'others' against which to construct its boundaries, as Donaldson points out:

> Through hegemonic masculinity most men benefit from having control of women; for a very few men, it delivers control of other men. To put it another way, the crucial difference between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities is not the control of women, but the control of men and the representation of this as a 'universal social advancement', to paraphrase Gramsci (Donaldson 1993:655, cited in Hooper 2001:70).

Dominant masculinity as part of a national identity is derivative, relational and oppositional. In order to draw its boundaries it needs 'significant others': women and other 'lesser' males who constitute the point of reference with which to construct a form of restrictive citizenship.

The Islamist Civilization project can be considered to be an attempt at constructing a modern Sudanese Muslim national identity related to the construction of a Sudanese hegemonic (or dominant) masculinity: a masculinity which formed part of the attempt at creating an exclusivist citizenship. In the case of the Sudan, the search for citizenship has therefore been marked by a process of securing the boundaries of the Sudanese national identity whereby 'black non-Muslims', are constructed as the 'lesser males' and thus, apart from women, as the significant 'other'.[22]

So even though the Sudanese government denied direct involvement in the Darfur conflict and thus in its racist discourse, the timing of its occurrence does seem relevant: the notion of 'blacks' has shifted from a label by which to address the Sudanese in the South to those in Darfur. Even though the Fur and Masalit were called '*zurug*' before that time, in Darfur it came up as a an official discourse of 'non-Muslimhood' and the equivalent of a status as 'non-Sudanese' after the eruption of the current violence and the peace negotiations with the South in 2002. Thereby the position of 'significant other', and thus as non-citizens, shifted from the South to Darfur.[23]

The use of women and 'other lesser' males as markers of the boundaries of national elites is a recurrent theme, and not only in Islamic societies. Masculinity does not necessarily refer to real men, but rather to features that a nation-state tries to use as a means to assert an image of respect and strength. The image of a strong nation-state is related to, for example, a large army, a winning sports team, a strong leader, or a severe national discourse on citizenship. Thereby some categories of men are,

---

[22] This is not to say that the Central Sudanese population is to 'blame' for racism. Rather, it has been part of the way national identity has been constructed and thus has become part of a discourse of power and privilege, which is related to the history of slavery. Central Sudan became a booming center of slave trade while ruling both the areas where the administrative elite resided and the slave-raiding areas. This past has become part of Sudan's national present.

[23] During my stay a difference was considered between '*zurug*', blue, to refer to local people who might even act as leaders, and '*aswad*', black, used for those considered '*abid*', slaves. I am not sure of the relevance of this difference in the current discourse of the Janjaweed, however.

implicitly or explicitly, referred to as constituting the dominant masculine ideal, and others as its denial. In the case of the Sudanese nation state, this notion of 'other' has historically been cast as in ethnic-religious terms. The war in Darfur can therefore indeed be seen as a 'southern Sudan' revisited. It is thereby important to note that 'black' does not refer to skin-colour in any determined way: the Central Sudanese elite as well as the Darfur population, both sedentary and nomadic peoples, consists of peoples with different shades of skin colour: thus it is very difficult to judge from the skin colour whether a person is an 'Arab' or an 'African'; a 'nomad', 'farmer', or a 'member of the riverain elite'. This is even evident when looking at those Sudanese who are members of parliament. The notion of ' black' seems to be, rather, a rhetorical device in a discursive struggle over political power and the legitimacy to rule.

Violence by the government seems to be the ultimate consequence of the search for means to mark the boundaries of an exclusionary form of citizenship such as is constructed in the Sudan. This is not to say that the application of violence by the Sudanese government in order to (re-) construct a national self is thereby made understandable, or justifiable, on the contrary. It does mean, however, that a more radical shift in thought and practice is needed for breaking with this past of constructing otherness by reference to the notion of 'black', in order to attain a more inclusive notion of citizenship. This is first and foremost a matter of balanced socio-economic, political and cultural development. However, I agree with Amir Idris when he states that:

> The legitimising function of the apparatus of truth in the Sudan is the official denial of race as a source of conflict. By abolishing racial otherness as a socially relevant frame of reference, the dominant discourse in the Sudan removed the critical issue of ethnic and racial hegemony and discrimination from the realm of legitimate debate… Contemporary scholars of Sudan's civil war thus need to seek an alternative discourse of history that can be used to understand the root causes of the tragedy (Idris 2001: 26-28 and 136).

An alternative discourse, I want to add that is inclusive, rather than exclusive, in terms of ethnicity, locality, gender, generation, marital status and so forth. I, we, as scholars of Sudan have to acknowledge the differences and diversity in local histories and trajectories of transformation, in order to be able to rewrite a common Sudanese national history as a means of finding alternative roads to change.