

Ecology, Politics and Violent Conflict

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It was the year 1998. The famine in southern Sudan was threatening the lives of more than half a million people, especially in Bahr El Ghazal Province. The famine provoked a serious debate about its causes. Most commentators in the United Kingdom accused the war of being the main culprit. In the House of Commons, a Conservative MP stood up and said that the war in Sudan, and all wars in Africa for that matter, were caused by the political vacuum left behind by colonial powers and wondered if something could be done about that. Clare Short, the Minister for Overseas Development, called the honorable gentleman foolish to ask even implicitly for the return of colonialism. The war and the famine, she said, were the responsibility of the leaders on both sides of the conflict. They had to stop the war now, and everything would go back to normal. She sat down, happy in the feeling that she had defeated the argument of her Conservative opponent. The war, according to Minister Clare Short, is all about African leaders. The BBC, however, knew better. Commenting on the pictures of emaciated southern Sudanese children, its newsreader described the war as fought between Muslim Arabs in the north and Christian Africans in the south. The war was thus a religious and ethnic war.

All three interpretations belong to traditional schools of conflict analysis, which explains all armed conflicts in Africa as ethnic, tribal, cultural, or religious. Its advocates are happy to confine themselves inside the traditional box. Their interpretations throw Moses-stick of identity at all conflicts, and see there, it devours them all. This is not only an inadequate approach, but it seriously hampers efforts at genuine conflict management and conflict resolution. Such interpretations are only capable of making ad hoc interventions in the most important field of conflict resolution.

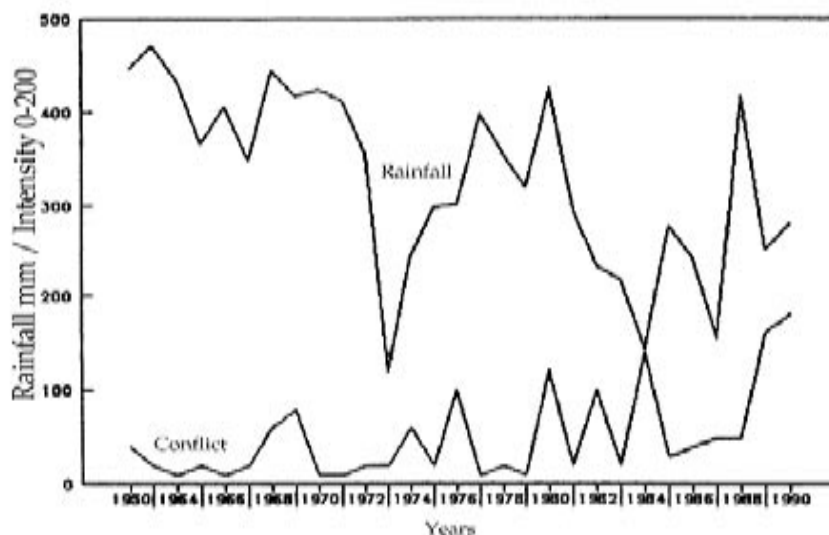
The two research projects we took part into “Environment and Conflict Project” (ENCOP) and “Environmental Change, Consensus Building and Resource Management in the Horn of Africa” (ECOMAN) (on conflict analysis and conflict resolution respectively), helped conflict research transcend these unsatisfactory approaches to conflict analysis and conflict resolution. ENCOP and ECOMAN gradually developed into powerful tools of conflict research precisely because they were looking for solutions both inside and outside the box. I participated in both projects for almost 10 years. During that period and was thus able to understand some aspects of the intricate web of cause and effect that characterises African conflicts in general and Sudanese conflicts in particular.



Lesson one: Environmental factors can be important but are not everything

One important message from ENCOPI and ECOMAN is that environmental degradation, (environmental scarcity, or in a broader sense, environmental discrimination 1) can act as a cause of conflict only in interaction with other economic, social, and historical factors. It tells us that environmental scarcity of renewable resources, especially cropland, fresh water, marine resources, and forests, is becoming more and more significant as cause and/or catalyst of armed conflict, especially in the developing world. Scarcity of renewable resources such as soil, water, fauna, and flora does not inevitably lead to violent confrontation and could well bring about desirable cooperation among the affected parties. Yet, in situations where this scarcity is aggravated by social and economic upheavals, as is the case in many poor Third World and most sub-Saharan African countries, the conflictual aspect of environmental scarcity appears to gain predominance.

In spite of its growing impact, researchers in the field of environment and conflict concede that environmental degradation is but one in a complex web of causes that collectively precipitate violent conflict. It functions within the given multi-layered matrix of history, economy, and politics and is most acute there where human and livestock population pressures are reinforced by unequal access to resources. Environmental degradation, however, is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa. The violent conflict in Jebel Marra in western Sudan provides a good example of the interconnectedness of several causes in the precipitation of violence.² Although the onset of severe drought was the major cause of disruption in economic and social life, it exerted its full negative impact only in interaction with other social and economic factors.



Graph 1: Rainfall data for the region of northern Darfur 1950–1990 against conflict intensity



Rainfall data for the region of northern Darfur covering the period from 1950–1990 reveals three major spans of drought, a relatively mild one in the mid-1960s and two severe droughts in 1972–1974 and 1982–1984. In all three cases, the drought was accompanied by the flaring of skirmishes, the worst of which took place in mid-1980s and became a high-intensity conflict.

The correlation of rainfall data to conflict intensity over a 30-year period (from 1957–1987) reveals two interesting patterns: first an increase in conflict incidents with a corresponding decrease in rainfall and second a lag between minimum rainfall and maximum conflict intensity of roughly one year, a relaxation period that allows for the impact of the drought to take full effect.

The drought of the 1980s brought famine, displacement, and violence on a much larger scale than that of the 1970s. Possible explanations of this apparent discrepancy between the impacts of the two severe droughts (1972–1974 and 1982–1984) could be:

1. In the 1970s, the agricultural food production of the Sudan was geared towards the internal market, but by the 1980s it was geared towards export.
2. During the 1970s, the regional food and other reserves of Darfur mitigated the impact of the drought, but by the 1980s these reserves were depleted.
3. In the 1970s, the local traditional administration was still functioning and supportive, but it was abolished by then-president Nimeiri in the 1980s.
4. In the 1970s, there was no large-scale warfare in the Sudan or neighboring countries. The 1980s witnessed the civil war in Sudan, while the Chadian-Libyan war had become widespread and large-scale.

Lesson two: Denying or limiting access to natural and social resources can be a more potent cause of violence than environmental degradation

ENCOP findings revealed the complexity of the root causes of violence, which go far beyond environmental discrimination, scarcity, or degradation. To incorporate economic, social, and other factors into the equation, broader terms were needed. Baechler coined the term “environmental discrimination” to give credence to the multiplicity and complexity of causes of violent conflict.³ One crucial aspect of this intricate web is the denial or limitation of access to natural and social resources to small-scale farmers and pastoralaists.

The African natural environment is fragile. The movie image of Africa as a continent overflowing with fertility is seriously misleading. In fact, the African environment is the most fragile on earth, and its vulnerability has been pushed to the limit over the past hundred years. Although the land and the people often demonstrate remarkable resilience in adversity, all too often the pressures of unsustainable exploitation of renewable resources have been enormously destructive. A spiral of human and environmental disasters has been the result.



No other continent suffers the same degree of **separation of agricultural from livestock production**. No other continent has such a high proportion of soils that are infertile and so easily degraded. No other continent has a climate of such unpredictability. These factors, made more potent still in combination, have severely handicapped African agriculture.⁴

In the web of causes that precipitate violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, environmental scarcity and denial and limitation of access to resources stand out as two of the most important factors that collectively precipitate violence. That is, violent conflicts arise mainly out of ecological and economic distortions. Baechler attempted to combine the two factors in the term environmental discrimination. The traditional assumption that violent conflicts in Africa emanate from ethnic/tribal, religious, and/or cultural differences is seriously limited. Except for old, so-called traditional conflicts, ethnic dichotomies appear to be rather a consequence of violence than a cause of it. However, ethnic, religious, and cultural dichotomies are very potent in the perceptions of conflicts as held by many fighters on both sides. The longer a conflict persists, the more these ethnic, religious, and cultural factors come into play. In an old conflict, when even the initial causes have petered out or died away, ethnicity can become an active social force. As Katsuyoshi Fukui and John Markakis note:

*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.*⁵

Somalia is a land of great ethnic, religious, and cultural homogeneity. However, when competition intensified over control of the state and the economy (mainly livestock trade) and for a greater share of renewable resources, mainly land and water, the contestants invoked sub-ethnic clan differences and fought along these clan lines for economic gains and state control. Rarely have wars proclaimed their true motivation, and the Somali conflict is no exception. However, if the violent conflict in Somalia continues unabated, 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.

Work carried out on environment and conflict by a number of research groups has shown that ecological degradation can act as cause or catalyst of violent conflicts. Greater emphasis, however, has been given in the research to the impact of ecological degradation than to the implications of the denial and limitation of access to renewable resources. This focus on the degradation of the renewable resource base imparts by default greater significance to the causes of environmental degra-



dation, namely, human and animal population growth, climatic variations, and so on.⁶ Such conflict analysis tends to limit conflict resolution to tackling the causes of ecological degradation and in the process neglects or belittles the consequences of limiting people's access to vital resources. With environmental degradation as the focal point, the proposed conflict resolution mechanisms are thus more technical in nature than economic or political.

This school emphasises issues of environmental conservation and rehabilitation as conflict management mechanisms, for example, better water management, soil conservation, reforestation, and family planning to curb population growth. The crucial issues of the economy, state power and politics, are inadvertently pushed aside. The persistent inequity in resource allocation, which is inherently political and economic, and the role of the beneficiaries and perpetrators of the status quo are thus taken out of the limelight.

In order to assess properly the impact of denying or limiting access to renewable resources in sub-Saharan African countries whose economies are largely confined to primary commodity production, some very important issues that are integral to understanding the causes of violent conflict and that are ultimately integral to conflict resolution must be considered: Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and export agriculture; the collapse of the terms of trade as a consequence of the deterioration of the prices of primary commodities; the economic, social, and ecological implications of foreign debt and of capital flight; and the reversal of investment trends.

In all group conflicts we scrutinised in Sudan and the Horn region, the primary concern of most people in arms were access to natural, economic and social resources, expressed in terms of justice, fairness, equitable sharing, and equal development. With resource access, conflict research enters the realm of politics, the economy, and the state. Technical solutions to violent conflict situations are no longer adequate. Both conflict analysis and conflict resolution must critique the conventional wisdom in this area and strive to be interdisciplinary.

Lesson three: Cultural diversity could be either Beauty or Beast

Although indirect and sometimes intricate, the relationship between culture and development can yet be discerned, albeit with great difficulty. In this context, culture shapes the material and spiritual forms that social and material development takes and is in turn enriched by the progress of this development. Culture is thus both a medium and a tool of positive social change. Problems, however, begin to arise when cultures, or rather cultural differences, are used not as a tool of progress but as a weapon to settle disputes in a violent way.

It is my understanding that people go to war because they are or they perceive themselves to be disadvantaged in the distribution or ownership of or right to the



available social, economic, and natural resources. Others fight to keep or enlarge their real or perceived advantages.

Real or perceived material advantages (or disadvantages) are the primary causes of violent conflicts. Yet few nations or groups of people would go to war openly under the banner of this or that material interest. Neither need nor greed is a good pretext to maim and kill. Loftier reasons are sought and found. Ethnic, cultural, and religious differences are cited, and in the process cultural diversity becomes cultural divide.

When people are satisfied with their living conditions, and these seem to be beneficial to all, cultural diversity is seen as a blessing to the nation, but when competition over resources increases because of need or greed, cultural differences are twisted into cultural divides and violence erupts along cultural fault lines. And because violent conflict is an inherently major disruption to social development, it is important to make it difficult or impossible to manipulate cultural differences as a pretext for waging war.

Attacking the cultural values of a group is usually followed by physically attacking members of that group. Pogroms and hate campaigns against the Jews, the Arabs, the blacks, the lower castes, the Native Americans, the Muslims, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Sikhs, the Hutu, the Tutsi, the Armenians, and others have all been used and/or are still being used to discriminate culturally against one group (ethnically, religiously etc.) in order to limit or deny the access of members of this or that group to social, economic, and natural resources. This is one obvious reason behind the ethnic discrimination of southern Sudanese and the Nuba and Ingessana peoples in Sudan. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that all three peoples are up in arms fighting for their human, social, and economic rights.

Cultural, ethnic, race, and religious discrimination is a major tool of economic exploitation and social repression. The cold violence of discrimination can easily turn into the hot violence of repression. Whether latent or raging, violence is inherently anti-development.

Lesson four: Identity issues can invert from perceptions to genuine causes of violence

Most violent conflicts start over material resources, actual or perceived. With the passage of time, however, ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations seem to undergo a transformation from abstract ideological categories into concrete social forces. In a wider sense, they themselves become contestable material and social resources and, hence, possible objects of group strife and violence. Although usually by-products of fresh conflicts, ethnic, cultural, and spiritual dichotomies can invert with the progress of a conflict to become intrinsic causes and, in the process, increase the complexity of the conflict, thereby reducing the possibility of manag-



ing, resolving, and ultimately transforming that conflict. The civil war in Sudan is living proof of this transformation.

At the beginning of the second civil war in Sudan in 1983, the causes of the new conflict were clear for everyone to see. The Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) attacked concrete targets: Chevron oil installations, the digger at the Jonglei Canal, and the tractors of absentee landlords. The south was defending its resources from the onslaught of the Sudanese business class, the Jellaba, and its government. Soldiers of the SPLA and members of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) were convinced that the war was all about the exploitation of resources taking place along the country's traditional fault lines of ethnic affiliation. However, when 15 years later I asked the same question, many Southerners sympathizing with the SPLM/SPLA responded that the war is mainly about *Arabisation* and *Islamisation*.

The perception of the war as an identity conflict between Muslim Arabs and Christian Africans has thus begun to take roots in the minds of many Southerners. Identity issues (religious, ethnic, and cultural differences) are inverting from being perceptions of the conflict to becoming inherent causes of it - from being abstract social and political categories to becoming concrete social forces. Effect has inverted into cause. That is why enduring, old conflicts are difficult to resolve, because the initial causes are constantly being augmented by the intrusion of feelings (perceptions) into the causal sphere.

The inversion of ethnicity (identity) from perception to a cause of violent conflict

A plausible explanation for this inversion of perception into cause can be found in studies concerned with animal and human behavior. Studies in human behavior has revealed that people usually judge options for future action according to the amount of effort they have invested in the past, rather than the size of the expected returns, what ethnologists call the Sunk-cost fallacy. In animal behavior, scientists found the reverse tendency: animals choose the option with the highest future benefit and thus do not follow the so-called Concord fallacy.⁷

Ethnicity as perception of a conflict can invert over time & cost into Ethnicity as Cause of that conflict

WHY? Because human behaviour follows the " Sunk-cost Fallacy '	while	Animal behaviour follows the ' Concorde Fallacy '
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which is: (To judge options according to size of previous investments to rather than the size of expected returns)		which is: (To judge options according to size of previous investments to rather than the size of expected returns)
Human beings often go for the sunk-cost option	while	Animals select according to the size of expected returns

The inversion of identity issues, for example ethnicity, over expended time and human and material resources is probably due to the sunk-cost fallacy. Human beings look back at the amount of effort invested in their endeavor and choose their actions and reactions accordingly. This is perhaps the reason why enduring conflicts are hard to resolve. Instead of opting for peace, people engaged in a persistent conflict will continue to fight arguing that: “We will not give up now, not after we have sacrificed so much. We will not betray our martyrs! We will not go back after so much investment in human and material resources etc.” Animals do not possess a moral memory! Their rationale is not muddled by sentiment. If the road followed by them does not lead to the benefits required, that road will immediately be abandoned and an alternative root explored.

Lesson five: Rationality and irrationality are both inherent to collective violence

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, impart uncertainty to the course of violent conflict, as well as to our attempts to understand and judge it as the actual behavior of actual people.

On first approximation, violence seems to be an irrational, chaotic behavior par excellence. It defies the rational and practical principle that in the 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. We now know that irrationality and chaos 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 the form 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 understand the rationality of social violence at the level of the individual participants, but we have a better chance in discerning some



of its gray substance as the concerted behavior of a large number of people, so-called “group violence”. The rationality and irrationality of violence are thus two facets of the same reality.

In sub-Saharan Africa today, there are no interstate armed conflicts. Irredentist and secessionist conflicts have receded, the Cold War and apartheid conflicts fought by proxy are on their way out, and liberation wars have been relegated to the past. But violent internal conflicts are growing in number and in ferocity. Traditional conflict analysis that relies almost entirely on ethnic, religious, and cultural dichotomies has been unable to explain the spread of internal conflicts and has also failed to provide useful advice in the most important area of conflict research, namely conflict resolution. The traditional approach to violent conflict often confuses causes, perceptions, manifestations, triggers, and catalysts. It tends to overemphasise one or two elements in the complex web of the causes of violence, usually ethnicity, culture, or religion. It has, therefore, been unable to appreciate fully the importance of economic and ecological factors in precipitating violent conflict.

Wherever human-made and natural adversities combine, as is the case for the Sahel with its persistent drought, subsistence economies begin to collapse. The assimilation of the African elite into the international free-market economy in the restricted role of resource extractors has received an enormous boost from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Their loan conditionalities have accelerated considerably the restructuring of resource utilisation away from local needs and local market towards the demands of the international market. Thus, despite the rapid increase in the area of land in use and increased export capacity, the overall effect of the new export-orientated policies has been negative. The value of primary commodities in the international market has steadily declined, and poverty has worsened in both the urban slums and rural areas. To prosper, the African elite needs to export more. To survive, the African poor have been forced to learn how to extract their basic needs from a shrinking resource base. In the process, conflicts have tended to multiply and intensify. This economic/ecological dimension in the prevailing spectrum of social violence is steadily gaining in importance, as cause or as catalyst.

Conflicts are historical processes, not static events. Therefore, when the wealth of a nation is dwindling because of intensive exploitation and degradation, it is only logical to assume that this loss will have far-reaching negative repercussions on social peace. To continue treating conflicts in Africa as purely ethnic, tribal, or religious, ignoring in the process the growing impact of restricting or denying access to resources and the growing ecological degradation and depletion of the renewable resource base could ultimately lead to a distorted understanding of the real situation and, consequently, limit the possibility of genuine conflict resolution.



An analysis of the civil war in Sudan has confirmed the viability of this approach and the need to extend it to other African conflicts. Ecological degradation in northern Sudan, caused by large-scale mechanised farming, has had a significant role in the return of the civil war between the North and the South of the country and in the gross destabilisation of traditional agriculture and pastoralism in the most populous regions of Sudan.⁸ Sudan is a prime example of how an African elite driven to specialise in resource extraction has degraded its resource base to the extent that its expansion has become a necessity, justifying aggression against its own people as well as against its neighbors.

An additional factor to both the socio-economic decline and the degradation of the natural environment is the militarisation of rural poverty. Life in Africa revolves around the land, and when the land is degraded or access to it is limited or denied, the quality of people's lives is directly affected. And whenever land inadequacy and degradation are coupled with other push and pull factors such as political pressure, armed conflict, ethnic tension, deteriorating services and infrastructure, as well as physical insecurity, people begin to move to the safety of urban areas, or take up arms against their perceived enemy.

Lesson six: Understanding the culture of violence in the Horn of Africa demands a truly holistic approach

The Horn of Africa is conflict-prone. The whole spectrum of conflict typology is there. Interstate and civil wars are compounded by regional and local conflicts. As stated earlier, violence is baffling to rational thought. On first approximation, violence appears as an irrational and chaotic behavior par excellence. Let us hope that we will become wiser about the root causes of this evil ghost that haunts our region. In all conflicts we scrutinised in the Horn region, competition over natural, economic, and social resources seems to be the main culprit and, when asked, people insisted that they had taken up arms for social justice and equality.

Too many people doing the same thing

The armed conflicts that have afflicted the Horn region over the last three decades have usually been interpreted as typical ethnic/tribal and/or religious/cultural conflicts. While these categorizations may have served as plausible descriptions of earlier conflicts and may still have some bearing on how current conflicts are being conducted and perceived, the reality is that conflict causes tend to change and diversify. Changes in the economic, political, social, and ecological backgrounds influence gradually, if imperceptibly, the nature of conflicts, and so it is justifiable to assume that the far-reaching ecological and economic changes that have beset the Horn of Africa must have had a profound effect on social peace in the region. Prolonged severe climatic desiccation coupled with intensive exploitation of soil, water, forests, and other renewable resources, as well as the huge increase in human



and livestock populations, have so degraded the inherently fragile environment of the region that conflicts caused or catalysed by these compounding ecological factors were bound to take place. Four factors have contributed substantially to this state of affairs:

1. Countries in the region have been suffering from a slow rate of structural differentiation of their economies, that is, too many people are doing the same thing. This scant economic differentiation has drastically limited the opportunities to engage people profitably in activities other than traditional agriculture and pastoralism.
2. The “*too many people doing the same thing*” economy intensifies the effects of environmentally damaging practices. The damage to the environment is reinforced and aggravated year in, year out, by repeated land-use practices. The lack of economic differentiation also limits the possibility that other quarters of the economy will come to the rescue in case of an emergency or sectoral crisis.
3. While land resources have remained fairly inelastic while the population has continued to grow, the person/resource ratio has continuously increased. As a consequence, the carrying capacity of the regional ecosystem has been stretched to the limit.
4. The most menacing consequence of the inelasticity of both the economic system and the resource base is the decline in food security. In the Horn, food scarcity and conflict seem to go together the way vultures follow hyenas. Environmental security in the Horn is thus directly, but not exclusively, a function of the intensity of resource exploitation, which in turn depends on the availability of resources, mainly endowment in renewable resources, and on the number of people competing for these resources, that is, the person-to-resource ratio.
5. The distribution of resources is greatly dependent on the economic, political, and land-tenure systems in each country. Huge increases in commercial agriculture (mainly for export purposes) are pushing more and more people and livestock into marginal lands and into fierce competition for meager resources.

The overall situation is further complicated by the fact that resource endowment in the Horn is far from uniform. For example, highlanders in Sudan enjoy a relative abundance in rainfall and good soils, while their immediate neighbors on the plains suffer from persistent droughts. The opposite is true for parts of Eritrea and Ethiopia. This dichotomy increases the potential of inter-group conflict, what we refer to elsewhere as the “*desert versus the oasis syndrome*”⁹. The general implication of all these factors is chronic disruption of both the social and natural environments. Social disruption because the material needs of the population as well as their cultural, social, and spiritual needs are not secure, and environmental disruption because the sustainable use of the natural environment is being constantly hampered by the increasing number of people doing the same thing in an inelastic



resource base. In fact, ecological degradation in the Horn has been so severe that traditional means of agreement in the settlement of occasional resource disputes have often been rendered virtually unworkable.

Hence, it is not surprising to find that many current Horn disputes are not taking place along traditional political borders but along the ecological borders that divide richer and poorer ecozones. This fact highlights the need for a broader approach in the analysis and interpretation of potential and actual armed conflicts in the region. This approach should take the impact of environmental scarcity and climate variation into consideration, thus enabling the parties concerned to deal effectively with a very complex situation. Continuing to treat conflicts in the Horn of Africa as purely political and/or ethnic/tribal and ignoring the growing impact of environmental discrimination and of the unsustainable exploitation of the resource base can only lead to a distorted understanding of the real situation and consequently drastically limit the possibility of genuine conflict resolution.

Lesson seven: We need to differentiate between structural and direct causes of a conflict. The example of civil war in Sudan

Sudan is a country at war with itself. Violent conflict is raging on four fronts: civil war in the south, high intensity conflict in the Nuba Mountains, and high to medium intensity conflicts in the east and west of the country. To understand the turmoil of violence and dislocation, a differentiation between structural and direct causes of violence is useful. Structural problems are responsible for making the country susceptible to unrest, while the direct causes are those that actually precipitate the violence.

Structural causes of violence

Countries of the Horn region in general and the Sudan in particular are plagued with inherent structural problems that are conducive to violent conflict whenever significant immediate causes arise. These major structural issues are augmented and reinforced by resource and identity dichotomies. They collectively influence the state of war and peace in the region. For example and in brief:

Poverty: Per capita income is less than a dollar a day; 68% of the workforce works in agriculture and animal husbandry, 9% in industry, and 23% in the service sector, compared to 1.8%, 21.2%, and 77%, respectively, in the UK.

The post-colonial state: The post-colonial state has failed to function as the vehicle of development, peace and democracy. Instead it has become highly politicized, often ending in one-party clientelist states (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front [EPLF] in Eritrea, the Tigray People's Liberation Front [TPLF] in Ethiopia, and the National Islamic Front [NIF] in Sudan). Such states are incapable of meeting the challenges of development, democracy and peace.



Bad governance, lack of democracy and rampant corruption:

Since independence, all Horn countries have scarcely experienced peaceful democratic rule. Brutal yet corrupt military dictatorships followed corrupt weak civilian dictatorships. Civil society organization are banned most of the time, trade unions and women organizations when they exist are usually state creations. The media is in the hands of government. Security is tight, corruption is rich. The people cannot see hope in the future nor can they feel safe. Living is a burden, existing a continuous strife.

Non-productive urbanisation: Contrary to the urbanisation process during the industrial revolution in Europe, the urbanisation process in the Sudan is a movement of people from areas of little food and much physical insecurity to urban centers, where access to food and physical security are relatively more certain. Almost 40% of the young are unemployed and are thus available to other forms of exploitation, for example, to recruitment in jihad activities and other military campaigns.

Most people are doing the same things: Most people plant the same crops and rear the same animals. There is little structural differentiation in the national economy. This means that in times of crisis very little help can be expected from other sectors of the economy, in contrast to the way, for example, the UK has dealt with its BSE and foot and mouth disease crises.

Environmental degradation: The “too many people doing the same thing” syndrome means that damage to the natural environment is aggravated year in, year out. Degraded land is promptly abandoned, and machinery and tractors are moved in to adjacent and more distant lands. There is, however, scarcely any virgin land left. The indigenous owners resist the encroachment of mechanised agriculture, and violence erupts between the local people and the absentee landlords, the government usually supports the latter. When **the tractors face resistance the tanks move in**. For example, the movement of mechanized agriculture into the area south of the Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains, and towards the south proper has been met with stiff resistance.

Land scarcity: The land available to traditional farmers has dwindled, due to the allocation of huge tracts to large-scale mechanized farming of land owned by absentee landlords. 8,000 families own Nine million hectares, while four million hectares belong to four million traditional farmers. In one single public announcement in 1993, the government distributed some seven million hectares in southern Darfur alone. One Galal El Dien Issa Mustafa was granted 439,000 hectares, an area about half the size of Lebanon!

Uneven development: During the colonial and post-colonial periods, most industrial, service, financial, and infrastructural developments were based in the north. Higher education and advanced health centers were located in and around the



capital, Khartoum. Urban Sudan and its ruling elite prospered at a huge cost to rural people. This discrepancy has not only led to growing migration to urban centers but has also fostered among rural people a feeling of injustice and discrimination.

Uneven resource endowment: The overall situation is further compounded by an uneven distribution of resource endowment. Resources are unevenly distributed and unevenly shared. Land is scarce along the Nile; water is scarce in the plains around Jebel Marra and the Nuba Mountains in western Sudan; and in the south rain is abundant, but the soils are not as good as in the north..

Climatic variations: Since 1967, rainfall has been erratic and has decreased to half the previous annual average. The beginning of the Sahel drought coincided with the establishment in Sudan, with support from the World Bank of the Mechanised Farming Corporation (MFC). The scissors effect of drought and land scarcity has left deep wounds in rural Sudan, and people took up arms against their perceived enemies, mainly the state and its allies, the Jellaba.

The low status of women: Women's social, economic, and political status is a major structural impediment to economic and social progress. In all countries of the Horn and in Islamist Sudan very few women are allowed a significant share in economic and public life.

External players: The economic policies of multinational companies, the IMF, and the World Bank have encouraged export agriculture against the requirements of the country's food needs. For example, during the famine years from 1982–1985, Sudan exported 621,000 metric tons of sorghum, the staple food of the people, to the European Union and Saudi Arabia for animal feed. The IMF's country representative in the Sudan called the plunder "the sorghum success story in the Sudan". He praised the government of Sudan for exporting sorghum and earning so much foreign currency.

Direct causes of violence: Resource and identity problems

In addition to the structural problems that beset Sudan, deep-rooted traditional identity dichotomies (ethnic, cultural, and religious differences) between the north and south play an important role in inciting violence. In addition, new and far-reaching resource issues emerged during the 1970s and 1980s that rendered the south immensely lucrative in the eyes of the Jellaba: the discovery of oil in Bentu in the south, the digging of the Jonglei Canal, the prospect of some 10 million hectares of former swamp land being made cultivable, and the possibility for the military to at last be able to move their motorized armed convoys by land from Khartoum down to Juba in the south without encountering the bottleneck of the Sudd swamps. The fragile edifice of Sudanese society began to collapse under the strains of expanding and compounding resource and identity problems.

The gradual depletion of large tracts of land in the north through unsustainable large-scale mechanised farming, the denuding of forests and grazing lands, erratic



rainfall, and the mismanagement of water resources have all conspired to lower the productivity of the central plains, the major source of wealth and subsistence in northern Sudan. For the first time, the Jellaba and their state became immensely interested in the natural resources of the south, namely, in its land, oil, and water.

Oil: In April 1981, Chevron announced the discovery of commercial deposits of oil in the Unity Field of its southwestern concession. Recoverable reserves from the Unity and the adjacent Heglig fields were officially estimated at 236 million barrels. Confirmed oil reserves for the whole of Sudan were estimated at two billion barrels. This is enough to earn the country some US\$10 billion or cover its projected energy needs for 10 years.

Original plans to process the oil locally were deferred in September 1982. Instead, with Chevron's encouragement, the Nimeiri government opted for the construction of a refinery and an export terminal south of Port Sudan, linked to the oil fields by a 1,400-kilometer pipeline. This sudden reversal of policy alerted people in the south to the probable intentions of Nimeiri and his backers among the Jellaba. One of the first acts of the SPLA was to attack Chevron's oil field installations, forcing the company to suspend work in February 1984.

Since then, large deposits have been discovered in many areas, mainly in the south. Extracted oil is transported through a 1,600-kilometer pipeline to Red Sea ports for exportation. To secure the uninterrupted flow of oil, the government has waged scorched-earth military campaigns. Indiscriminate killing and burning are in full swing all over the exploration and extraction areas. The consortium that exploits the oil wealth is the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC). It is made up of the Chinese National Oil Corporation (CNPC) with 40% of the shares; the Malaysian Petronas Carigali Overseas, which holds 30%; the Canadian Talisman Energy Inc. with a 25% stake and Sudapet (Sudan government) with only 5%. Lundin Oil AB, a family-owned Swedish oil company based in Geneva, has struck oil in block 5a. Lundin is the major operator there, with 40% of the shares. Other stakeholders in these concessions are Petronas with 28.5%, OMV of Austria with 26%, and again Sudapet with only 5%. The British companies Weir (Glasgow) and Rolls Royce supplied the pump stations. Each day 200,000 barrels are exported, and this is may soon to increase to 400,000. Already the oil returns are covering the running costs of the civil war, **some US\$400m**. Above all, the credit-worthiness of Sudan has shot up. Once again, sales people are coming to Khartoum offering everything from Chanel No. 5 perfume to helicopter gunships. China, Malaysia, Austria, and several east-European countries, including Russia, Poland, Bulgaria and the Ukraine, are all cashing in. Even the European Union is now engaged in a so-called critical dialogue with the regime. The oil areas have become both extraction and killing fields. The omens are bad for the people of Sudan, especially in the south.



Water: Since the beginning of the century the idea of constructing a canal to drain the Sudd marshes of the White Nile at Jonglei has been debated by developmentalists and environmentalists alike. Conceived from a desire for more water downstream and the prospect of uncovering a vast expanse of fertile land, the Jonglei Canal is one of the most intensively researched water projects in the world. What has always been conspicuous by its absence, however, is any serious assessment of how the local people, some 1.7 million Dinka, Shilluk and Nuer, Murle, Bari, and Anuak, who will be directly or indirectly affected by the project, actually feel about it.¹⁰

Actual construction of the canal began in 1978 as a joint Sudanese-Egyptian project in collaboration with the French CCI Company. Aimed at conserving some four billion cubic meters of water that evaporates annually, the operation was forcibly suspended in 1984, with about 250 kilometers of the proposed 360 kilometers completed, following a series of attacks on the construction site by the SPLA. Egypt desperately wants the additional water represented by its half share in Jonglei, some two billion cubic meters, to help grow more food for its burgeoning population. Before the expansion of mechanized farming, Sudan was not under the same pressure to obtain water. Since the mid-1970s, however, water has become the limiting factor for agricultural expansion in many parts of northern Sudan, since new irrigation projects need more water.

The 450,000 Dinka, Shilluk, and Nuer who are directly affected feared the drastic changes the canal would bring to their way of life. They could not accept the prospect of life without the migration to the toich (swamp area) during the dry season, where they find fish and improve the milk yield of their cows. They also feared the prospect of alien people being settled in their midst and the possibility of conflict. Rumors that Egyptian farmers would be sent to the canal area sparked student riots in Juba in November 1984. There was justifiable mistrust of the project from southerners, who saw the north and Egypt benefiting, while their own way of life was being irreversibly changed, and not for the better. By drying out the swamps and taking away the “grass curtain”, the canal would open up the entire Sudd area for mechanized farming, the domain of the Jellaba. It would also allow the government to move its military equipment and troops into the south with greater ease. Thus, the project’s giant earth-excavating machine, the biggest in the world, was one of the SPLA’s earliest targets, much to the chagrin of the governments of Sudan and Egypt.

Land: The fertile savannah plains of acacia trees and tall grass are where the “breadbasket” was envisioned. More predictable rains make these plains suitable for sorghum, millet, maize, sesame, groundnuts, and cotton. The huge expansion of large-scale mechanized farming, which constantly devours new land, spread into southern Kordofan and into the northern parts of Upper Nile Province. The



owners of the mechanized farms, having exhausted vast tracts of land in the north, pushed inexorably southwards into areas inhabited by the Nilotic tribes, the major cattle economies of the south. Having seen how the local people were squeezed off their land elsewhere, the people in the south and in the Nuba Mountains were hostile to this incursion. **Their response was to challenge the intruders by force of arms.**

In spite of armed resistance, the NIF government is planning the distribution of some 17 million feddans among its supporters in the Jonglei Canal area. As mentioned earlier, in one single day, the government has allocated 16.5 million feddans in southern Darfur to its clientele.

Lesson eight: War and violence are most tragic in a heterocultural society.

The case of the Nuba conflict

Before the onset of violent conflict in the Nuba Mountains, the diverse Nuba people were fully aware only of their clan affiliations. They neither perceived themselves as a Nuba nation nor actively sought to be one. Their relations with their Arab (Baggara) neighbors, the Hawazma and Misiriya, were good to tolerable. They exchanged goods and services, and intermarriage was an acceptable practice, especially with 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 ethnic or economic strife.

Along with other factors, the war has been crucial in bringing out and solidifying the awareness of the Nuba as belonging to a larger ethnic group, a united and quasi-homogeneous Nuba people. As a result, many Nuba increasingly perceive the conflict as an ethnic conflict. There is even a small core of angry Nuba who believe that all Arabs should be thrown out of the Nuba Mountains in a final, radical solution. For this group, ethnicity has already crossed the threshold from perception to cause of the violent conflict. 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.

In fact, it is difficult to characterise the Nuba society as either a monocultural or a multicultural society. The current mountain society is an excellent example of what Jacques Chevalier and Daniel Buckles call a heterocultural society.¹¹ The Nuba have never been a monocultural group. They are generally aware of the common destiny and other values that unite them, but they are also conscious of the differences. After 200 years of sharing the mountains with the Nuba, the Baggara exhibit similar heterocultural features. This intra-group diversity has arisen from Baggara-Nuba interdependence and the relative isolation of the two groups in their fairly secluded hill clusters. Nuba and Baggara cultures have overlapped and permeated each other. However politically improper it may sound today, every Bag-



gara embodies dynamic elements of Nuba culture and vice versa. Nuba-Baggara relations, be they cooperative or conflictual, have been instrumental in shaping their heterocultural society, and because these relations are in constant flux, Nubanness and Baggara-ness are dynamic identities, impossible to solidify in monocultural or multicultural casts. War in such a society is particularly tragic because it cuts deep wounds where the two groups have intermingled, amalgamated, and enriched each other.

Most violent conflicts are over material resources, actual or perceived. However, with the passage of time, ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliations seem to undergo a transformation from abstract ideological categories into concrete social forces. In a wider sense, these identity issues become contestable social resources and, hence, possible objects of group strife and violent conflict. Although usually by-products of fresh conflicts, ethnic, cultural, and spiritual dichotomies can invert with the progress of a conflict to become intrinsic causes and, in the process, increase the complexity of a conflict, thereby reducing the possibility of managing, resolving, and ultimately transforming it. The Nuba armed conflict is living proof of this transformation.

Lesson nine: Traditional conflict resolution can only work if both the conditions and the actors are right

The Borana and Fur conflicts: Similar features, different outcomes: The relatively tranquil settings of the Jebel Mara massif in northern Darfur in western Sudan and of the Boran area of southern Ethiopia were profoundly disrupted during the 1980s by prolonged drought, which had persisted with minor interruptions since 1967.

In the past, when faced with deteriorating natural conditions, people moved to a nearby virgin land, mobility being a way of African life. There were enough empty corridors, then. There are practically none now. Climatic variations, large scale mechanized agriculture for export purposes, and urban consumption, as well as large increases in human and livestock populations, have all conspired to limit or deny access to new resources. Ultimately, these ecological buffer zones have gradually lost their distinction as areas of refuge and as borders of cooperation among neighboring peoples.

With the persistence of the drought, pastoral groups in the Fur and the Boran areas began to fall apart. Livestock died in large numbers, and their owners began to dispose of the rest for next to nothing. Soon after “the year of meat” ended, “the year of famine” began. The city merchants immediately turned away from the collapsing economies, leaving them to their own fate. Once both nature and the market had abandoned the people, their lives turned into a real struggle. These rural societies became ripe for dislocation, turbulence, and, ultimately, war. At the



height of the drought in the mid 1980s, violent conflicts erupted in the Boran and the Fur lands. A closer look at the two conflicts reveals great similarities in their ecological, political, and social aspects:

In both conflicts, pastoralists suffering from persistent drought (the Zaghawa and others in Darfur, and the Abore and others in the Boran area) were seeking refuge in the lands of the Fur and the Borana, respectively, which are richer in water and pasture. The conflict is, therefore, taking place along the ecological borders between rich and impoverished ecozones, the so called “desert versus the oasis syndrome”.

The emerging need of the pastoralist groups and their animals to stay for unspecified, long periods in the lands of the Fur and the Borana has led to the breakdown of all previous mutual agreements that allowed pastoralists limited access, in times of scarcity, to pasture and water. For example, the “Arab” pastoralists were previously allowed to enter Jebel Mara from January to the first rains, usually in May. In both cases, there were no inherent ethnic or religious differences between the two adversaries. The Fur and Arabs are Muslims, the Borana and their opposing 14 ethnic groups have similar traditional religions. Ethnic barriers were easy to surmount. For example, an Arab pastoralist who settled among the Fur soon became one with all duties and rights of a typical Fur, and the opposite was also true. Ethnic antagonisms are more a product of the conflict than a cause of it. As both regions are far from the capital city and now have little appeal to traders, government intervention in both conflicts was relatively limited. In essence, we are dealing here with armed conflicts of local people against each other, the weak against the weak.

The introduction of modern arms in the traditional conflict arena is mutual to both conflicts. This is especially so in Darfur, where the proximity of the Chadian-Libyan war brought in large amounts of cheap modern weapons and the possibility of military training of combatants from both sides of the conflict. For example, the price of an AK47 with accessories was about US\$40, far less than its international price. It was estimated that in 1990 there were more than 50,000 modern small weapons available in Darfur, one for every man over the age of 16. Several attempts at resolving the conflicts through peace conferences initiated by central and regional governments have not succeeded in bringing peace to the regions.

The Fur and Boran conflicts are typical to the Sahel and Horn of Africa regions. Weakened by prolonged drought, pastoralists and their animals move into areas of better pasture and more water, with the apparent intention of staying there for as long as necessary. Previous agreements that had allowed limited and temporary sharing of water and land resources become no longer binding. The inhabitants of the relatively richer lands refuse entry to the desperate pastoralists, and whenever there is no mitigating powerful third party, the friction ultimately leads to violent



confrontation.

The Borana achieved peace, while the Fur continue the fight: In March 1993, in a great traditional religious ceremony, the Borana blessed a peace agreement with the Abore and some 14 ethnic groups (including the Konso, Tesmay, Hammer, Dasenech) against whom they had been fighting in and around the Umo valley, south of Ethiopia near the Kenyan border. A year later, the Borana made a similar agreement with their Somali enemies, the Garri. After years of violence around water holes and grazing lands, and after all appeals to the government had failed to solicit any positive response, the elders of the Abore and the Hammer decided it was time to meet the elders of the Borana to settle the conflict in a fair and equitable way. The first meeting went well enough for 10 young Borana to visit the Abore on 13 January 1993 to negotiate details of the peace accord. Meanwhile, as a prelude to peace, all livestock were allowed free access to the buffer zone between the Borana and the rest.

It was then agreed that the peace between the Borana and the Abore could not be complete without the inclusion of all affected parties. All 14 ethnic groups were therefore invited to the final and crucial general assembly in the homeland of the Abore. The meeting took place on 8 March 1993 in Gonderaba, a traditional religious center of the Abore people. The peace conference affirmed two fundamental principles to be strictly adhered to in making peace in the region:

First, the Abore and all other ethnic groups agreed that the Borana had all traditional rights over their land. Traditional right over land is understood as right of use, not absolute ownership. Second, the Borana accepted that all rival groups and their animals had an inalienable right to survival.

To adhere to both principles, it was decided that the other groups and a limited number of their animals would be allowed to access Boran lands after harvest time and could stay there for a limited period, depending on the rain situation. Further measures were decided upon, namely:

- A council of 40 members representing all ethnic groups would oversee the agreement.
- A boarding school would be built for the children of all groups, so they may know more about each other and befriend each other.
- An agricultural center would be established to improve the health of all herds.
- Water management schemes in the area would be supported.

Improving the quality of life of the people and their herds was thus considered vital for lasting peace because it entailed greater social security.

What this peace settlement shows is that in times of scarcity the prerequisite for peace is temporary, possibly asymmetric, but certainly sustainable sharing of contested resources, as well as respect of the fundamental right of the stricken people and their animals to survive. The “winner (owner) takes all” mentality and an in-



sistence on so called historic rights that totally exclude all others in need is a sure recipe for confrontation.

Why the Fur conflict continued, or the “boys from town” syndrome: The most obvious cause for the failure to achieve peace in the Fur conflict was the exclusion of local leadership from peace negotiations. Professionals from both sides of the conflict dominated all meetings and peace conferences: teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, and so on, in other words the “boys from town”.

The boys from town were not able to understand the significance of two crucial principles associated with the conflict:

First, in spite of their apparent temporary economic insignificance, pastoralists and their animals constitute an organic and important part of the economic and ecological systems of the region, for the desert and the oasis are inherent parts of the same ecosystem. Therefore, the problem should not be seen in terms of “us against them” but in terms of “live and let live”. This solidarity is necessary for both sides and is not an act of sheer generosity of one side towards the other.

Second, land right is not synonymous with absolute ownership of land (i.e. land as mere economic space). The boys from town consistently argued in terms and concepts of Western and town law, namely that ownership allows absolute hegemony over land. Most rural Africans understand customary land right as right of use, not as absolute, unrestricted ownership. For them land is concrete space, the soil, the grass, the trees, the hills, the river, the ancestral burying ground, and the place for rituals. Land is thus economic, social and spiritual space, or simply, land is life.

Because of these two principles, it is possible for the local leadership to understand the necessity for temporary sharing in times of need, namely, the right of other peoples and their animals to survive. However, instead of dealing with the most pertinent issues of sustainable sharing of the contested natural resources, the boys from town spent valuable time quarrelling about the sharing of political power in regional and central government. They were more concerned with their own town interests than with those of their respective rural peoples.

Lessons to learn from this comparison: The first lesson to be learnt from this comparison of two very similar violent conflicts and their diametrically opposed conclusions is that in local conflicts local leaders should be the major actors in conflict resolution. Left to themselves, most people tend to choose cooperation most of the time, and if provided with the right assistance, all people will choose cooperation all the time. The second lesson is that the principle of temporary, asymmetric, and sustainable sharing in times of crisis is a necessity for conflict resolution and for long term survival, not only for the suffering side but for both adversaries. The third lesson demands that outsiders appreciate the particular understanding of land ownership of most traditional African societies, namely that of right of use rather than of absolute ownership.



The insistence on so called historic rights to ownership of land and other natural resources and the imposition of urban concepts of ownership on societies in turmoil cannot facilitate the processes necessary to resolve simmering or raging conflicts. May the wisdom of the Borana and Abore prevail in all similar conflicts!

Lesson ten: The internally displaced can be worse off than refugees

Mobility and migration: The exit option: In many parts of Africa migration has traditionally been a way of life. Some European researchers have attributed African people's mobility to "discontent with the existing political community" or suggest that faced with a deterioration of circumstances, people either leave (exit) or stay and make their dissatisfaction known (voice).

The traditional exit option has thus been understood as a reaction to political coercion or economic hardships. While this explanation may be true for a number of cases, the most compelling reason to move may have been ecological rather than political or economic.

Migration in Africa, as the pastoral way of life clearly shows, was one of the most important mechanisms to adjust to ecological changes in a continent plagued with poor soils, pests, unfavorable climate variations and other natural adversities. Faced with natural or social problems, people moved into ecologically or socially more friendly areas. Conducive to this tradition of people's mobility across Africa were the following factors:

1. Low population numbers, even in rich ecozones, and as a consequence
2. Little competition over natural resources, e.g. availability of large areas of virgin lands, forests, and grasslands
3. The absence in Africa, except for in the Sahara, of insurmountable natural barriers to mobility, e.g. mountain massifs, large waters, and zones with extreme climate and weather conditions
4. The practical absence of well defined and well secured political borders, manifestly reflected in the prevailing sense of the people of belonging to an ethnic group rather than to a nation or a nation state.

With the advent of colonialism, however, this situation of unhindered mobility, the exit option, began to change. It suffered especially drastic limitations in the post independence period. Indeed, large scale migration is no longer tolerated and those who are forced to resort to it are now usually kept in refugee camps as near to the borders as possible until they can be repatriated. In fact, African political borders have assumed added significance of late because of increasing competition for dwindling resources. It is interesting to note in this context that in spite of all the turmoil and upheavals in Africa, one thing has emerged unscathed and unchanged, namely the system of the so called arbitrary political borders of the continent. Since its inception, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has made it an article



of faith to keep the borders intact and has taken very good care to ensure that they were.

Yet the process of emancipation from colonialism set in motion forces that drastically increased the number of people fleeing from natural and social calamities. The first large scale displacement of people occurred in 1957 in Algeria. By 1964, there were about half a million African refugees. The one million mark was passed in 1970 as the anti colonial liberation wars intensified in the Portuguese colonies. By the middle of the decade, one third of all internationally recognized refugees in the world were in Africa. By the end of the 1970s, the number rose to four million refugees, and in 1983 the number of African refugees was estimated at between four and six million. Today, of the total 17 million refugees recognized by the UNHCR about one third are Africans.

Some specific African aspects: In dealing with issues related to environmental degradation and people mobility, some specifically African aspects should be taken in consideration:

1. The internally displaced people in Africa far outnumber the cross border refugees usually by a ratio of four to one.
2. Displacement is predominantly a rural urban migration, while refugees are usually confined to rural border regions, that is, their migration is mainly rural rural.
3. Refugees confined to rural areas usually find themselves in familiar ecological and cultural habitats, e.g. the Eritrean refugees settled in eastern Sudan were in familiar terrain and among familiar people. Many displaced people, however, have to traverse large distances in order to find food and physical security in towns or richer areas. In the process, the displaced often find themselves confronting alien cultures and alien natural environments, as is the case with the southern Sudanese Dinka, Shilluk and Nuer, who were forced to leave their rich savannah areas and cross hundreds of kilometers to settle finally in the arid north among alien people of an alien culture. Further, while most refugees immediately join the rural working force, the displaced, who are not legally entitled to UNHCR assistance, must either rely to great extent on ad hoc aid or join the competing millions trying to scratch a living within the so called informal sector.
4. There seems to be a strong empirical correlation between the number of the people on the move, both refugees and displaced, and food security problems, with the displaced suffering greater food shortages and depravation.
5. Because of the general deterioration of transport infrastructure and scarcity of fuel, the rural transport system is usually one of the first services to suffer. The result is that ecologically degraded areas, unable to secure their food needs and unable to produce for the market are immediately shunned or ignored by the market, which is interested only in people who can buy its goods.
6. Women and children constitute the majority of the displaced people, and the ra-



tio of men to women to children is roughly 1:2:3, or one man to every five women and children (e.g. Sudan's displaced total 3,527,000, of whom 1,880,000 are children, 1,200,000 are women and 447,000 are men).

7. This fact sheds some light on the observation that a growing number of displaced men revolt against their misery by either taking up arms against the government of the day in a rural uprising against the central government (or alternatively become mercenary soldiers fighting in neighboring conflicts), or, given the weakness of many central governments in Africa today, opt to join the forces of regional warlords seeking to establish mini states. Another option is of course to attempt to displace neighbours living in a richer area by force. A classic example of this weak against weak conflict is the war against the Fur and Nuba in western Sudan.

8. A final characteristic in this respect is the fact that most refugee communities remain indefinitely alien in their new abode, and even the children of refugees born in exile may become refugees themselves. There are many instances of third generation refugees in Africa. Only Tanzania and to a smaller extent Botswana have given refugees the option of taking up citizenship.

Conclusion:

Although the NIF government is apparently in tact, its so-called Islamic Project in the Sudan is in tatters. The most obvious manifestation of this grand failure is the overthrow of the political Islamists and their leader Dr. Hassan Elturabi by the Jihadist fraction or Action Islam, headed by the putschist, Ali Osman Mohamed Taha. With the war on terror, the fall of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Jihadists became cornered, nationally, regionally and internationally. The choice was limited: either fundamentally transform or perish. This NIF regime is a master of gesture politics, opportunism and appeasement. The Jihadists will not give up unless desperate. They are ready to fight (with other peoples' children) to bribe (with other peoples' money) and to blackmail (with a repertoire of sordid and sleazy connections).

The suffering Sudanese peoples on both sides of the conflict divide have been promised the heavens, lasting peace, economic development and social progress. No mention of the rule law, respect of human rights including women rights or democracy with all it entails.

Above all, there is scarcely any mention of transforming the conflict by tackling its structural causes, for example, reducing the rampant poverty, rehabilitates the collapsed social services and managing the natural environment in a sustainable way.

The Sudan is a continent of conflicts. Addressing only the manifestations of social unrest is not enough and however the authority behind the coming peace treaty may be, if it does not effectively tackle the structural causes of violent conflicts, it will also fail and new uprisings will again proliferate.



In the play 'Galileo' by B. Brecht, there is a scene showing the old master in great elation and excitement having spent the night observing the sky with a newly acquired telescope. When his landlady enters the room he grabs her from the waist and forces her to dance and all the while he kept shouting 'today begin the new times, the new times begin today! When he at last put the exhausted lady down she asked him gasping:

'Herr Galileo, and in these new times would you be able to pay your rent!

Let us hope that we all could!

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