Exploring Displacement in Darfur

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Submission: January 2013

This paper is submitted in partial fulfilment of the MA degree in Development and Emergency Practice, Oxford Brookes University
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“A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring: There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, And drinking largely sobers us again.”
Alexander Pope (1709)

ABSTRACT

Since war broke out in Darfur in February 2003, approximately three hundred thousand people have died and three million people have been displaced (Seferis, 2010:61). This is a shocking statistic, and has provoked widespread media attention globally. However statistics without context are almost worthless and Darfur is an unknown context to most.

This paper explores displacement in Darfur, seeking to establish a proper context within which to understand these recent events. An investigation into Darfur’s history, geography and ethnography provides the necessary backdrop for a comprehensive analysis of displacement. Displacement pervades every facet of Darfur; its economy, religion, military, politics, environment and demography. Furthermore, Darfur has a fluidity of geography and society which contrasts starkly with the Western worldview. Consequently, displacement in Darfur has tended to be wrongly perceived as a unique phenomenon in an otherwise static and stable society. This is simply not so. Displacement is intrinsic to Darfur’s history and identity.

From this analysis a theoretical framework is developed for understanding displacement in Darfur. This ‘displacement paradigm’ broadens the definition of displacement, roots it within Darfur’s specific context, and re-conceptualises displacement as not merely the result of Darfur’s war, but also a significant cause of it. Development policy and practice need to be rooted in Darfur’s local context, and to incorporate displacement into its strategies for rebuilding livelihoods in Darfur.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people: my supervisor David Sanderson – for his enthusiasm, his patience and his good advice; my mother and father – for loving me, believing in me and ever encouraging me; and my wife, Claire, without whom life is not worth living.

I dedicate this paper to the hundred thousand people in who were displaced this month (January 2013) as fresh fighting broke out in Jebel 'Amer, Northern Darfur. I know none of them but their courage is more than worthy of this dedication.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

Signed____________________________ (candidate)          Date __________________

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CHAPTER ONE: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

This paper explores displacement in Darfur. It is emphatically about displacement and about Darfur, and more precisely it is about displacement in Darfur. Both are frequently misconstrued; thus it is useful to look again at both. This chapter evolves by first introducing the (1) focus (Darfur and displacement), and then answering three questions: (2) why (motivation and inspiration) (3) what (aims and objectives) and (4) how (research method).

1.1 DARFUR FOCUS

Everyone has heard of Darfur, but a decade ago Darfur was one of the least known places on earth. In 2003 war broke out between Darfur rebels and government-backed Arab militia and as the violence escalated, civilians became the targets and widespread ethnic cleansing resulted. To date approximately three hundred thousand people have died and three million people are displaced.

Darfur is now famous. The media spotlight has projected this western region of Sudan onto the front page of newspapers globally. However, with its renown has come widespread misunderstanding and confusion. Rob Crilly (2010) argues that advocacy campaigns have unhelpfully stereotyped the war, with simplistic generalisations and excessive rhetoric. Most prominent has been the ‘genocide’ lobby, which has succeeded in swaying international opinion and even influencing the International Criminal Court, despite the inconclusiveness of its claim. Ironically, much of the media’s reporting on Darfur is pervaded by the similar polarising dualism to which reporters themselves attribute the ‘genocide’. Such dualistic thinking is dangerous, both in the media and in academia, and has hindered intellectual discourse on Darfur (ibid.). There is a legitimate concern that simplistic conceptions of Darfur will shape policy and practice, and that rigorous academic reasoning will be overlooked. De Waal (2005) voices his concern of ‘outsiders’ to Darfur taking control of development policy and practice, with only a shallow understanding of Darfur’s actual context, drawn from ‘disaster tourism’ instead of rigorous research with ‘insider’ perspectives.

This paper looks at Darfur in its own right, focussing not so much on the last decade of war, but instead on the historical and cultural context of Darfur - the requisite context within which recent events can be analysed. The focus on Darfur is overt and intentional; it is hoped that this paper addresses the imbalance of thought concerning displacement in Darfur. Displacement needs to be reconceptualised, rooted in its local Darfur context and not imposed by Western perspectives.

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1 Mortality and displacement figures are controversial. Degomme (2010) have statistically analysed mortality figures, and estimate the total number of deaths to be 298,271, with a 95% Confidence Interval of 178 258—461 520. The UN estimate of those displaced in Darfur is estimated at 2.7 million IDPs and half a million international refugees (Seferis, 2010:61).

2 The International Criminal Court accused the Sudanese government of genocide in 2010, despite the fact that the war in Darfur, atrocious though it is, is unlikely to meet the legal definition of genocide. Genocide is defined as “intentional murder of part or all of a particular ethnic, religious, or national group” (Schabas, 2000). Natsios (2012:154) explains that Darfur has experienced ethnic cleansing – “the expulsion of a population from a given territory” – but not genocide, since it lacks the requisite intentionality.
Mass displacement has occurred in Darfur, and represents a challenge for the region’s recovery and development (Seferis, 2010). Thus this paper focuses specifically on displacement in Darfur, researching the historical and cultural context of displacement, and its place in Darfur’s identity.

Displacement is a difficult word to define, and in recent years the term has become almost synonymous with forced migration. However, Bakewell (2011) questions the extent to which displacement can be distinguished from regular migration and identifies three distinct semantic domains for these two terms, which he warns can easily be conflated and misunderstood. (1) The first centres solely on refugees as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention. The second and third emerge as a reaction to the first: on the one hand (2) extending the definition of displacement to include forced migrants who have not crossed an international border – internally displaced people – and on the other hand (3) including also patterns of migration predominantly motivated by voluntary and self-determined choices (Zetter, 1988:5). The broadening of the definition has provoked a vigorous debate over the nature of displacement, which remains unresolved (see Hathaway, 2007; DeWind, 2007; Cohen, 2007).

By any definition, Darfur has undoubtedly witnessed mass displacement: hundreds of thousands of refugees have settled in neighbouring countries; millions have relocated to internal displacement camps in nearby towns and cities; and millions of others experience displacement as an intrinsic part of their historical and cultural heritage, reacting to seasonal, occasional and permanent changes to their livelihoods. Richmond (1993) explains that a clear distinction between forced and voluntary migration does not exist. Violent conflict might trigger a family’s decision to move, but socio-economic factors are often even more important, particularly in determining the destination and timing of the move (Engel & Ibáñez, 2007; Bloch, 2008). Speare (1974:89) reinforces this point:

"Migration can be considered to be involuntary only when a person is physically transported from a country and has no opportunity to escape from those transporting him. Movement under threat, even the immediate threat to life, contains a voluntary element, as long as there is an option to escape to another part of the country, go into hiding or to remain and hope to avoid persecution."

Displacement in Darfur is the focal point of this paper and is analysed throughout, so it is necessary to offer a clear operational definition. Accordingly, Bakewell’s third definition of displacement is used, extending the term beyond the realm of only refugees and internally displaced peoples and widening its scope to include all forms of migration, whether forced or voluntary. Therefore, the working definition below suffices:

**Definition of displacement:** **forced or voluntary migration as a result of changing circumstances.**

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3 The 1951 Refugee Convention definition of a refugee: a person who is outside their country of origin and is either unable to or unwilling to come under the protection of that country due to a ‘well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social group or political opinion’ (UNHCR, 1951)
1.2 WHY? MOTIVATION AND INSPIRATION

Much has been written on Darfur, displacement or displacement in Darfur over the last few years, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a complete summary or an exhaustive review of all these. This paper is not intended to reach comprehensive conclusions about these topics. Rather, the intention is to facilitate balanced and accurate thinking about displacement in Darfur by exploring its historical origins and cultural significance, and thus providing a correct and appropriate context within which to understand the current crisis. This is currently of particular relevance to development policy and practice in Darfur, as efforts are made to help displaced peoples in and around Darfur whose livelihoods have been damaged or destroyed by the war. It is therefore both pertinent and timely for the development agenda of Darfur. Moreover, this research has been of personal significance to the author, who from the autumn of 2013 onwards will be working as a development practitioner among displaced peoples in Darfur. Thus this research is the result of a personal interest in Darfur and is of practical significance in the author’s professional career.

There are many ways of approaching a complex topic (Fig 1.1). A healthy dose of humility is required when analysing any situation, and especially one as complex as Darfur. No single perspective or explanation can adequately summarise the Darfur dilemma. Instead, what is most helpful is to piece together a number of different viewpoints and angles so that the complex reality can be carefully balanced and calibrated between them. Accordingly, this paper seeks to look at displacement in Darfur by developing a particular lens – called the ‘displacement paradigm’. It approaches the issues from a particular perspective, delivering a unique insight, though undoubtedly subject to its own limitations. These limitations are acknowledged and reflected upon in the research method; moreover, it is hoped that this paper provides a starting point from which further research can build a rigorous evidence base enabling this paper’s findings to be refined and adapted further.
1.3 WHAT? AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

There are two key problems that have motivated the hypothesis and defined the aims of this paper. Firstly, the people of Darfur are victims of a dramatic and terrible upheaval. In recent years, the political, economic and social landscape of Darfur has changed irreversibly. In the midst of continuing military confrontations and political negotiations, the people of Darfur have had their livelihoods destroyed by a conflict that they are powerless to resolve.

1st Problem: The people of Darfur have suffered greatly and mass displacement has occurred.

Though powerless to resolve the conflict, the people of Darfur are emphatically not powerless to rebuild their livelihoods. A tragedy has taken place and this immediately leads on to the next question of what can be done in response. Humanitarian intervention duly followed after the crisis emerged, with well-intended emergency relief and peacekeeping efforts flooding into Darfur. However, this prompts an additional more profound question: is the response helpful? The answer leads us to the second problem that has shaped this paper: too often good intentions fail to deliver good results on account of shallow and sometimes naïve appreciation of the issues at hand. In particular, a profound understanding of Darfur’s context is required in order to both diagnose the livelihoods challenges and also to consider sustainable responses.

2nd Problem: Responses to displacement risk being ineffective if the local context is not understood.

In particular, a historical and cultural understanding of the role of displacement in Darfur’s identity is essential. However, the concept of displacement in Darfur has risked being subsumed into a Western world view, where societal stability is rooted in principles of inertia, with permanent settlements and stable households. Displacement is often erroneously perceived as the absolute antithesis of a normal functioning society. The media has tended to frame displacement in Darfur as a one-off phenomenon brought about by freak circumstances, as though it were an anomaly in the otherwise stable and static society. This is simply not so, which motivates the undergirding hypothesis of this paper:

Hypothesis: Displacement is intrinsic to Darfur’s history and identity.
This paper develops this hypothesis by considering the second problem and exploring the centrality of displacement in Darfur’s local context. This gives rise to the ‘displacement paradigm’ – a lens through which displacement in Darfur can be approached with more clarity. Finally, once this is established, the first problem of mass displacement and widespread destruction of livelihoods can be properly considered.

The structure of the paper therefore reflects this concern for analysing the historical and cultural context of displacement in Darfur, providing a detailed investigation into Darfur’s history, geography and ethnography (Chapter Two). This is followed by a corpus of evidence concerning the context of displacement in Darfur (Chapter Three). The ‘displacement paradigm’ is then developed as a helpful framework, which is then critiqued and briefly applied to the current situation of displacement in Darfur by means of conclusion (Chapter Four).

Thus, the introduction is succinctly summarised with a presentation of the aims and objectives of this paper:

**Aim:** To explore the context of displacement in Darfur

1. To investigate key components of Darfur’s history and culture (Ch.2)
2. To analyse the role of displacement in Darfur’s history and culture (Ch.3)
3. To develop the ‘displacement paradigm’ for understanding displacement in Darfur (Ch.4)
1.4 HOW? RESEARCH METHOD

The following research questions mirror the objectives stated above:

1. What are the key components of Darfur's history and culture?
2. What is the role of displacement in Darfur's history and culture?
3. How should displacement in Darfur be reconceptualised?

This section develops the methodology used in answering these questions, and therefore in accomplishing the paper's aim. A thorough research method requires rigour, clarity and impartiality, all the more so since the academic fields of development, humanitarianism and forced migration do not have a standard research methodology of their own that can be systematically applied. Consequently a multi-disciplinary approach is needed, with methods borrowed from various social-science disciplines and, along with it, a comprehensive outline of the research process.

No primary data collection is undertaken for this research; it is entirely desk-based, and wholly reliant on secondary data sources. Whilst it might have been advantageous to undertake primary research, the time constraints combined with the difficulty of access to displaced populations in Darfur has made it unlikely that any collected data would be sufficiently relevant and reliable for usage. Consequently, rather than collecting substandard or tokenistic data by primary means, the author has preferred to focus exclusively on reliable secondary sources. The research method comprises of six phases: (a) Familiarisation, (b) Identification, (c) Condensation, (d) Interpretation, (e) Re-conceptualisation, (f) Application.
(A) FAMILIARISATION

The first step is to undertake a thorough investigation into all the possible avenues that are available to the desk-based researcher. Using key word searches, bibliographic searches and personal enquiries, a wide range of literary sources are amassed and broadly surveyed, to engage with comprehensive background reading and familiarisation with the topic. Hart (1998:13) defines a literature review in the following way:

“The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence, written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.”

It is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake a fully comprehensive literature review and establish a systematic evidence base, given the length limitations and the complexity of the issue at hand. Nonetheless, secondary data from a wide range of sources has been collected in order to provide a systematic backdrop for the researcher. This includes academic papers, journals and books, United Nations reports, Sudanese government surveys, case studies of refugee camps and popular media sources. In pursuit of avoiding particular biases, academic publications have been balanced with media sources and first-hand accounts. Thus the author has familiarised himself with the wide spectrum of secondary data available.

(b) IDENTIFICATION

In accordance with an inverted pyramid methodology (Scalan, 2003), the broad perspective provided for in the above familiarisation phase has led the author to a more focused and localised investigation into the current disconnect between displacement in Darfur today and displacement in Darfur’s history. There is a noticeable lack of consideration for the context of displacement in much of the literature reviewed, as well as an anthropological bias for presenting it as a unique phenomenon in Darfur, thus distorting historical conceptions of displacement. Such perspectives have been criticised as being both politically motivated and simplistic (De Waal, 2005). But the concerning implication is that today’s mass displacement in Darfur is being erroneously conceived of and therefore erroneously responded to (Arabie, 2012). Thus, the particular angle of research is identified, motivating the primary aim of this paper, and the associated hypothesis, with the objectives and research questions providing a roadmap for the investigation. The identification phase establishes the particular focus: that this paper explores the evidence that displacement is at the heart of Darfur’s history and part of Darfur’s identity long before the recent upheaval occurred.

(c) CONDENSATION

Having clarified the particular focus of the research (the context of displacement in Darfur), the specific relevant secondary data sources are collected, evaluated and analysed. The identification
phase provides a focus which facilitates the condensation phase, by defining the criterion for what literature is relevant to the research question. Research with historical, cultural and displacement emphases have been included, whilst literature referring only to recent war in Darfur have been for the most part excluded. The particular interest in Darfur’s history and culture has presented some challenges, with a scarcity of historical records about Darfur, and a concern over their veracity. Where such records are used in this paper, their limitations are discussed for the sake of transparency. Nonetheless, a wide-range of sources has yielded satisfactory evidence to answer the research questions. In order to avoid a bias in the research, literature was reviewed from a variety of experts on Darfur drawn from many different academic fields: social anthropologists (e.g. De Waal and Tully), Africanists (e.g. Kapteijns), historians (e.g. O’Fahey, Daly), political theorists (e.g. Grzyb, Flint, Natsios), development consultants (e.g. Strachan and Peters). Their differing and overlapping perspectives on displacement in Darfur provide a rich combination and a balanced understanding. These form the backbone of the condensed corpus of data.

(D) INTERPRETATION

In order to both analyse and display the evidence, categorisation is important. Thus, in this interpretation phase, the author has sought to amalgamate similar data into overarching categories. This is described in data collection and analysis as topical, or thematic, organisation (Guest, 2012). However, given the significance of the categories in influencing outcome of the research, it is important that the choice of categories is fully discussed and justified; this evaluation takes place at the beginning of Chapter Three. This categorisation is not freestanding and does not have authority in and of itself, but instead is a means of presenting data which in its totality commands authority. In order to appropriately analyse and present the evidence of displacement in Darfur’s history and culture, and based on extensive reading and research, the author chose the following themes, which form the backbone of Chapter Three:

Fig 1.2: Categorisation for Displacement Analysis
(e) **RE-CONCEPTUALISATION**

Having interpreted the data collected according to the above categories, displacement in Darfur can be reconceptualised based on this evidence. This paper presents the ‘displacement paradigm’, which is a new theoretical framework for analysing displacement in Darfur. This concept is developed in *Chapter Four*, and is motivated from the evidence presented in *Chapter Three*. The validity and impartiality of this new framework is questioned and critiqued in *Chapter Four* also. This reconceptualisation is a viable tool which can be applied to the current situation in Darfur, and thus represents both the least academically rigorous and the most academically useful part of this research. Its very originality undermines its authority, since it contrasts starkly with current practice in Darfur. It is therefore essential that this new paradigm is explored further, critiqued more fully, and researched in more depth through future investigation.

(f) **APPLICATION**

Having developed the ‘displacement paradigm’, it is appropriate to apply it to the current situation in Darfur, and to consider its implications. For the most part it is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake such an investigation, since it requires significant additional research, as well as a broadening of the scope to consider its implications in the many different spheres of influences to which it is relevant. Additionally, it would benefit from primary research undertaken in Darfur, applying the displacement paradigm to real situations on the ground. This paper’s aim is to explore displacement in Darfur, and not to apply it to development policy and practice. It is sufficient to observe some applications of the research and to open up future avenues of research.
CHAPTER TWO: INVESTIGATING DARFUR

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the second research question: What are the key components of Darfur’s history and culture? It functions as a bridge between the author and the readers, providing a common foundation upon which the displacement analysis (Chapter Three) and displacement paradigm (Chapter Four) can be developed in a coherent and consistent manner. Furthermore, for those readers less familiar with Darfur, this chapter supplies the necessary introduction for understanding what follows. (1) The Geography and Ethnography and (2) the History are considered in turn.

2.1 GEOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Darfur means ‘homeland of the Fur’, named after the Fur Sultanate who held power in Darfur for several centuries. It is the western region of Sudan and covers an area of almost 500,000 square kilometres, which is roughly the size of France (UNICEF, 2005:1). It is mostly made up of an arid plateau punctuated by a mountainous centre, with the famous Jebel Marra extinct volcano rising to over 3,000m (Fadlalla, 2005:55). De Waal (2005:36) describes four prominent features of the landscape. Firstly, goz (sandy soils) which typifies much of Northern Darfur as it extends into the Sahara, as well as the vast expanse in the East stretching out towards Kordufan and the Nile Valley; secondly, wadis, the seasonal watercourses which perforate the arid land, providing fertile alluvial soil for farming; thirdly, basement rock which protrudes above the ground, sometimes covered by a thin layer of soil, but often bare and inhospitable; finally, there are the mountains mentioned above, inaccessible by road but profiting from high rainfalls and a lush, almost tropical climate. Darfur spans the Sahel and the Sahara, with seasonal rains that are both essential to livelihoods and notoriously unpredictable (De Waal, 2005:36). These topographical and environmental details set the stage for understanding displacement: Darfur’s vastness and diversity testify to both the extent of its inaccessibility by conventional means of transport and the potential benefit of domestic movements as a result of its internal disparities.
The population of Darfur is unknown, though thought to be between six and eight million, of which about three million are currently technically displaced (IDMC, 2011). Darfur is home to between forty and ninety different ethnic groups (Flint & De Waal, 2005:8). The human geography of Darfur reveals small areas of fertile land with dense population, separated by great distances of wilderness with sparse population (O’Fahey, 2008:2). Darfur is made up of sedentary farmers settled in villages and nomadic pastoralists grazing the land in between. However in practice the distinction between these two is commonly blurred: farmers frequently invest in livestock as a form of wealth management, and pastoralists similarly engage in farming as a coping strategy during times of duress (Daly, 2010:154).

De Waal (2004:181) asserts that there exists a clear ethno-political east-west axis of separation in Sudan, with Darfur expressing a surprisingly distinct and homogenous identity compared to the Nilocentrism of the North of Sudan, with the majority of the ruling elite in Khartoum being drawn from just three Arab tribes (comprising only 5.4% of the national population). Natsios (2012) describes this as the ‘Arab Triangle’ – the small triangular shaped area between Port Sudan, Dongola and Sennar from which almost all the elite originate. Darfur is part of the excluded periphery of Sudan, with a high level of ethnic diversity, but with a historical commonality of identity shared between its inhabitants. Darfur has a complex ethnography, and indeed ethnicity itself is a complex notion. Most definitions of ethnicity allude to identifying with and belonging to a social group with shared heritage, race, culture or language (e.g. OED, 1666). However, these characteristics and commonalities are often far more fluid and transferable than popular conceptions allow for, and this is especially true in the case of Darfur (O’Fahey, 2008:9). At best, ethnicity is a discrete label which categorises information about clusters of people in a generic manner. It is the result of both interpretation and simplification. Its classification is inherently subjective, contingent on the classifier’s particular perspective, which often varies dramatically between the insiders’ self-identification and outsiders’ labelling. Furthermore, ethnicity is constantly evolving and therefore cannot be absolutely and definitively defined (Jones, 1997). Nowhere is this truer than in Darfur, with its profoundly multifaceted ethnographic landscape.

There is substantial evidence that the inflexible demarcation of ethnicity in Darfur, which emerges as a common theme in most contemporary narratives of the war, is a recent phenomenon with doubtful historical or indigenous root (cf. Tully, 1988; De Waal, 2005; O’Fahey, 2007). Rather, the advent of ‘Arab supremacist’ in the 1980s propagated from outside Darfur by Khartoum and Libya was responsible for the rapid polarisation of ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ tribes which we see today (De Waal, 2005:xiv). The so-called ‘tribalisation’ of Darfur has proved to be an expedient political tool for the Khartoum administration. Capitalising on several decades of an intentional Arabisation policy, in 2003 the Sudanese government recruited and funded Arab-militia groups (known as Janjaweed) to subdue the rebel groups, who were tokenistically branded ‘African’ for the purposes of legitimising their suppression. Natsios (2012:12) summarises succinctly that the solution to Sudan’s struggles with diversity has consistently been an agenda of forced Arabisation. This Arab-African dichotomy is
indeed helpful for framing the causes of the war, but risks oversimplifying the issue and distorting the truth. De Waal (2005:xiv) disparages foreign commentators for overemphasising this polarisation, since it is neither a normative feature of Darfur’s history nor representative of the present situation.

O’Fahey (2005:10) asserts that ethnicity in Darfur is a “very moveable and slippery concept”. De Waal (2005:47-54) elaborates on this by demonstrating that ethnicity is better defined by citizenship than by ancestry. He cites numerous examples of ethnic adoption, tribal assimilation and identity shifts in Darfur’s history. Diverse communities which consented to Fur patronage willingly accepted Fur identity and effectively ‘became Fur’ (Beaton, 1939); similarly, on the occasion of sedentary farmers adopting pastoralism, they were identified as cattle-herding nomads and therefore became de facto Arabs (De Waal, 2005:51). Walzer (2008:23) quotes a Darfur refugee saying “in our land it’s difficult to find a Fur without Arab blood, or an Arab without Fur blood.” Additionally, Doornbos (1988) wrote an insightful paper entitled On Becoming Sudanese where he observes the processes of ‘Sudanisation’ of tribes in Darfur – occurring among Arab nomads and ‘African’ farmers alike. Moreover, throughout history, tribal alliances have been built between different tribes with little degree of regularity or recurring pattern – giving credence to De Waal’s hypothesis that ethnicity was historically an expression of citizenship rather than common ancestry. Even as tensions reached their climax in Darfur, there was a clear consensus that the problems arose not from ethnic or identity schisms, but from the denial of the rights of full citizenship to Darfurians and the elitism of Khartoum in its political control (Flint & De Waal, 2008:14). Natsios (2012:120) summarises: “racial, tribal and linguistic identity in Darfur has historically been much more fluid than in other societies.” The fluidity of ethnicity in Darfur is important for understanding the fluidity of movement in Darfur. These two are profoundly interconnected.

O’Fahey (2004:24) describes three traditional ‘ethnic zones’ in Darfur from north to south: the north is predominantly made up of nomads from both Arab and non-Arab (Zaghawa and Bideyat) descent; the central zone is inhabited by mainly non-Arab farmers (Fur, Masalit, Tama etc.) cultivating the lands surrounding Jebel Marra; the south is occupied mostly by cattle-grazing nomads (the Baqqara), many of whom have become Arabised in the last three centuries (ibid:35). Darfur is not and has never been ethnically homogenous in any part, nor have ethnic boundaries any permanence, though this was the prevailing ‘traditional’ conception of ethnicity in Darfur until the mid-20th Century. Ethnicity is best understood as common citizenship and not as common ancestry, with frequent influx and outflow across ethnic boundaries based on shared livelihoods and not race or culture.
2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.2.1 PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY

The first historical records of an organised society in Darfur date back to the Daju State of the 13th and 14th Century, followed by the Tunjur state based in Jabal Marra in the 15th and 16th Century (O’Fahey & Tubiana, n.d.:2). The Daju and Tunjur are sedentary tribes in Darfur to this day. During their rule Islam arrived in Darfur. In 1492 a Moorish Prince exiled from modern-day Spain by King Ferdinand travelled to Darfur, converted the Sultan and married his daughter. Over the centuries, Islam gradually expanded its influence across the region in conjunction with the migration of Arab tribes from the East and Fulani from the West, and today almost 100% of the population are Muslim. The Tunjur empire collapsed in the 17th Century, and in its place the Fur Sultanate was established from 1660 by Sulayman Solongdungo (Daly, 2007). In time, Al-Fasher became its capital, and throughout the 18th Century numerous wars were fought against the Wadai empire further West (in modern day Chad). The Fur Sultanate steadily grew in size and power, and at its height it asserted control as far as the Nile Valley eastwards and Lake Chad westwards. During this era, trans-Saharan trade blossomed, passing through Darfur on the ‘forty day road’ to Egypt, and connecting the region with North Africa. The Fur Sultanate remained the dominant power for several centuries.

2.2.2 COLONIAL ERA

Ottoman influence grew in Sudan from 1821 onwards, and Darfur became one of their major trading partners, though still independent. However, in 1874, a powerful Sudanese slave-trader called al-Zubayr sent a slave-army against the Fur Sultan’s forces, and defeated them at the Battle of Manawashi. Al-Zubayr was then coerced into handing over control of Darfur to Egypt, to whom Darfur was notionally made subject. There followed a period of unsettled Egyptian colonialism until 1893 when the messianic Mahdist revolution which started in the Nile Valley spilled over into Darfur, and took power back from the colonialists (O’Fahey, 2008). The Mahdi was a religious leader who claimed to be the promised Messiah, and led an uprising against their colonisers with remarkable success. However, the British-Egyptian army eventually overthrew the Madhist army at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, whereupon the Fur Sultanate was briefly re-established under the reign of Ali Dinar, until the British conquest of Darfur in 1914 saw the ultimate demise of the independent Darfur. During the early 20th Century, the British Empire unusually maintained the traditional governance structures as a means maintaining control of Darfur, with ‘indirect rule’ through the ‘native administration’ (Natsios, 2012:29). There followed several decades of tokenistic colonial rule characterised by chronic under-development and political under-representation, with frequent revolts and uprisings (Daly, 2007:115-143). Flint and De Waal (2008:12) indict the British treatment of Darfur as ‘worse than neglect’, claiming that their lack of development and restriction of
education was a deliberate strategy to ensure that local hierarchies would not challenge the Sudanese administration from Khartoum. The British never invested properly into Darfur and never asserted full control of the region (Natsios, 2012).

### 2.2.3 POST COLONIALISM

In 1956 Sudan gained independence from the British. Whilst successive coups and political infighting ensued in Khartoum, Darfur was for the most part a forgotten entity, suffering from its geographic, historic and ethnic obscurity. During this period, Natsios (2012) attests to the dominance of the ‘Arab Triangle’ in the governance of Darfur, which over time became aligned with Islamism. In 1973 President Numayri composed a secular constitution which sought to abandon the Sudan administration’s ‘Arabisation’ and ‘Islamisation’ agenda, deposing of any ethnic supremacism; Sudan was to be both Arab and African. However, the pervasiveness of Islamism in politics, the influence of Libya, the persuasion of a renowned Islamist ideologue (Hassan al-Turabi), meant that this constitution was never signed, and Sudan’s pendulum swung rapidly away from secularism and towards Islamism (ibid:52-56).

### 2.2.4 RECENT HISTORY

In 1989, General Omar al-Bashir launched a military coup against the government and won, establishing a strong government which has endured to the present day. The last thirty years of Sudan’s history have been mired by seemingly ubiquitous and continuous war, violence and rebellion. The North-South Civil War has rolled on from 1983 until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. Additionally, there was a Beja rebellion in the East, a Nubian rebellion in the North, and three Darfur rebellions in the West, the third of which came into the international spotlight and was called a ‘genocide’ by many (Straus, 2005). Natsios (2012) argues that the numerous uprisings against the government were motivated not so much by the ethnic divides often cited by media, but instead by the political oppression of Khartoum under the Bashir administration and the ‘Arab Triangle’.

#### (A) THE FIRST DARFUR REBELLION (1987 – 1989)

The combination of Chadian rebel cross-border operations in Darfur and the return of Islamic Legion fighters from Libya with a radical Arabisation agenda posed a very serious threat to security of Darfur’s non-Arab inhabitants, of which the Fur were the largest tribe. Fur tribal leaders recruited 6,000 fighters to defend their villages, but an adverse effect was that the Khartoum government perceived them as a security threat (Natsios, 2012:127). The government responded with what was to become their common strategy: divide and conquer (Flint & De Waal, 2008). They gave weapons to ‘Janjaweed’ Arabs in Darfur who operated as a militia force to suppress the Fur for two years. A peace agreement was ultimately signed with the government promising 1) the deportation of rebels...
from Chad, 2) safe return for displaced peoples, 3) the provision of legal codes for water and land usage, 4) the re-establishment and empowerment of local government, and 5) most importantly, the disarmament of militia groups (Natsios, 2012:128). Tragically, none of these measures were implemented, setting the stage for a troubled future.

(B) THE SECOND DARFUR REBELLION (1995 – 1999)

In Western Darfur, the largest sedentary tribe is the Masalit. Masalit-Arab tensions had been growing since the famine of 1984/5 when the dominant Masalit tribes had excluded Arab tribes from humanitarian aid because they were perceived as “newcomers and interlopers” (Natsios, 2012:130). The Masalit dominance in local politics threatened the central government in Khartoum, and the government’s response was brutal: the National Intelligence Security Service summarily arrested and executed the majority of local Masalit leaders and intellectuals (ibid.). As the Masalit armed themselves in defence, the government declared a state of emergency and then armed local Arab militia groups to quell the rebellion (Daly, 2010:262). Natsios (2012:131) encapsulates: “by arming the local Arab militias against the Masalit, the central government had provoked and then exacerbated the animosity between the tribes.” This is symptomatic of ethnicity becoming an increasingly polarising identity issue for Darfurians, though this is almost without historical precedence (De Waal, 2005:xiv).

(c) THE THIRD DARFUR REBELLION (2003 ONWARDS)

Riding on the wave of the first two rebellions, an ‘Arab Alliance’ grew up in Darfur in the late 1990s, with several Arab tribes forming protective alliances. In 2001 the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes united their forces in an act of solidarity against this threat (Daly, 2010:263). Natsios (2012:135) identifies four prominent issues that brought them together: 1) political marginalisation by Khartoum, 2) Chronic under-development across Darfur, 3) Recent human rights abuses by Arab Supremacists, and 4) a lack of democratic process through which to address these issues. The government’s response was a recurrence of their response to the previous rebellion.: they armed and trained Arab Janjaweed militia to reassert control of the area. However, in 2003 the rebels won a series of decisive military victories motivating a government-backed campaign of targeting civilian villages instead of merely the rebel forces themselves. Here the worst atrocities of the war were committed, with wide-scale ethnic cleansing, and a wholesale societal upheaval across the region leading to unprecedented levels of population displacement (Flint & De Waal, 2008:236-237).

The majority of the deaths in Darfur were caused in 2004, when Khartoum “broke the back of the rebellion” (Natsios, 2012:191). Since then the peacekeeping forces have provided some help, and there have been numerous high-profile peace negotiation attempts (ibid.). The fighting has decreased but has not ceased, and sadly the root issues are still far from being addressed. The complexity of the war cannot be overemphasised. It cannot be framed as merely an inter-tribal war, as demonstrated by recent events where Arab tribes have lost confidence in the government’s
support, and have switched allegiances to fight alongside the rebel groups. In September 2012 over 2,000 Janjaweed abandoned the government and offered their support to the Fur rebels. Natsios summarises the common characteristics of the three Darfur rebellions:

“The three Darfuri rebellions really represent one long war interspersed by temporary phases of tenuous peace. All three share the same poisonous racial component; were led by many of the same men and were met with the same reaction by Khartoum: to arm Arab militias, such as the Janjaweed, and use them to wipe out the rebel base of operational support. The results were the same, displacement of the civilian population, looting of their animals and herds (which represent rural farmers’ savings accounts and insurance policies against economic hardship); killing of young men likely to join the rebellion, and slaughter of tribal elites.” (Natsios 2012:135).

**TAKING STOCK**

*Chapter Two* has investigated Darfur by considering first its geography and ethnicity and second its history. The reader now has a context within which to conceptualise displacement. Already various themes relating to displacement have been introduced, pointing towards a strong historical connectedness between Darfur and displacement. The next chapter takes this further and focuses explicitly on the role of displacement in Darfur by considering several different facets of Darfur.
CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSING DISPLACEMENT IN DARFUR

The latter part of the previous chapter presented a historical categorisation of Darfur, divided along a linear timeline. In contrast, this chapter explicitly analyses displacement in Darfur by developing a thematic categorisation. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the second research question: 

*What is the role of displacement in Darfur’s history and culture?* An appropriate way of achieving this is by analysing the body of evidence according to the following categorisation of different facets involved in displacement:

![Fig 3.1 Categorisation of Displacement Analysis](image)

It should be emphasised that these categories are certainly not mutually exclusive from each other, but instead continuously overlap. They are profoundly interconnected, and are intended only as a means of presenting complex information, rather than a rigorous framework that is authoritative in its own right. The following diagram is helpful to illustrate their interaction; displacement is in the...
centre of a triangle of factors that impact upon it, and upon each other. Connections can be drawn between categories, representing their interdependent nature⁴.

**Fig 3.2 Triangular Categorisation of Displacement**

![Triangular Categorisation of Displacement](image)

Given the above conceptualisation, too much weight should not be attributed to any one category, since 1) the categories overlap 2) they were chosen subjectively, based on the author’s analysis of the literature 3) they are not necessarily of equal importance. Nonetheless, what follows is an analysis of the role of displacement in each of these categories, both from a historical perspective, and also in its current manifestation.

⁴The idea for conceptualising the categories in this way has been inspired the Common Assessment Framework (Department of Health, 2000) helps social workers not only analyse the needs of children at risk, but make connections between those needs - recognising how one factor feeds into another, with the child at the centre of the analysis.
3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The Socio-Economic Analysis incorporates three facets of displacement in Darfur: 1) economy, 2) religion and 3) famine; these are analysed in turn.

3.1.1 ECONOMY

This section considers the role of (a) Pastoralism, (b) Seasonal Labour Movement and (c) Trade in analysing the impact of Darfur’s economics on displacement.

(A) PASTORALISM

Pastoralism is the practice of grazing herding animals as a form of economic livelihood, migrating from less fertile to more fertile pastureland according to seasons. Pastoralism comprises the second largest socio-economic activity in Sudan after farming – constituting over 20% of the country’s GDP (Fahey, 2007:1). 80-90% of households in Sudan own livestock, and over 30% are reliant on livestock as their main livelihood (ibid.). In Darfur these percentages are higher, and pastoralism is of great, and increasing, importance (Fadul, 2006:37); two million people there are nomadic or semi-nomadic, relying on grazing wide areas of sparsely vegetated land in order to maintain their herds (Strachan & Peters, 1997:7-9). By spreading its liability across a large herd size and a large area of land, pastoralism has historically been highly resilient to shocks and stresses such as drought, famine and disease, thus contributing to the economic stability of Darfur (Elasha-Osman, 2008). During crises, nomadic pastoralists have effective coping strategies: moving to distant pastureland with better water and fodder provision, relocating to a more beneficial urban centre, and diversifying the size and variety of their herds. Leroy (2009:51) explains that “household mobility has also enabled adaptation to climate variability when core activities became under ecological pressure from drought.”

Pastoralism in Darfur is predominantly subsistent in nature – “living at a standard which satisfies minimum needs” (De Waal, 2005:55-58). Correspondingly, there is an ingrained pragmatism, with “herding regarded as an economic venture rather than a cultural imperative” (ibid:55). This demonstrates the flexible boundary between pastoralists and farmers, and the term ‘agropastoralism’ is used to describe their amalgamation.
Moreover, the migration routes of pastoralists pass through lands inhabited by sedentary farming tribes (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4), and historically there have been both partnerships and hostilities. Thus the seasonal migration of herds and people is a fundamental component of Darfur’s identity impacting all communities, whether nomadic or sedentary. Farmers have intermittently entrusted their herds to nomads passing through their land, especially when their herd sizes increase to such an extent that they can no longer be supported by the pastureland in the immediate vicinity of the villages. Likewise, trade of livestock and grain is common between farmers and nomads, providing mutual benefit. However, issues of land tenure, water usage, sharing of resources and crossing of international and regional political boundaries have also resulted in sporadic conflicts and disagreements. De Waal (2005:89) attributes this to differences in the ‘moral geography’, with pastoralists viewing land as a chessboard with one set of squares inhabited by farmers and other by nomads, to which they are entitled; As with bishops in a chess game, they have a right to pass diagonally across the land. This is juxtaposed to the moral geography of sedentary farmers, who see the entirety of the region surrounding their village as their possession and their homeland (dar), entrenched in the traditional legal system.

Furthermore, contrary to popular stereotypes, pastoralists are by no means exclusively Arab by ethnicity, with other tribes such as the Zaghawa and the Bideyat being predominantly pastoral also. The aforementioned ethnic fluidity of Darfur therefore renders little weight to simplistic equivalences, and supports the idea that all Darfur communities are routinely impacted by economic displacement. Widespread transhumance is constantly occurring across the whole region, exacerbated by times of hardship and drought.

This paper has defined displacement as “forced or voluntary migration as a result of changing circumstances,” which entirely encompasses both the motive and the practice of pastoralism in Darfur. The extent to which pastoralism impacts society, politics and the economy should not be underestimated or neglected, as so often happens with other pastoral groups worldwide (Fahey, 2007). Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism is intrinsic to Darfur, and thus lays a cultural and historic foundation for understanding the recent occurrence of mass displacement.
(b) SEASONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT

As mentioned above, traditionally Darfur has been a predominantly subsistence economy, but over the past few decades there has been gradual market incorporation, which has increased demand for wage-labour in the developing market economy (Tully, 1988). This has been paralleled with the emergence of urban centres of increasing influence; the most recent mass displacement since 2003 has rendered almost fifty per cent of the population urban, though questions are asked as to the permanence of this situation (Sudan Tribune, 2012). Though the trend towards urbanisation and the associated surfacing of secondary and tertiary employment has been more pronounced in recent decades, there is nonetheless a historic precedent for low-skilled wage-labour and the accompanying seasonal migration which this temporary form of employment motivates. This is most evident during times of duress, when livelihoods are under threat and agricultural yields are diminished, but it also represents a customary socio-economic pattern, of local migrants leaving their communities in search of wage-earning prospects elsewhere, especially during the dry season when farmers find themselves idle (Tully, 1988:132).

De Waal (2005:46) records the increasing tendency of Northern Darfurians in particular to move south (mainly to Jebel Marra) during the dry season in pursuit of seasonal labour - with declining yields and environmental degradation in Northern Darfur, more and more are relying on this wage-labour to tide their family through until the next harvest. Moreover, there has also been an increase in the selling of firewood, water and fodder as dry season economic activities - all of which require movement and migration locally. Daly (2010:230) explains that “migratory labour has long been a factor in Darfur’s economy... [for many centuries] there has been seasonal migration within Darfur for wage labour.”

A notable example of this type of displacement is the Gezira Scheme, initiated in the early 20th century along the Nile south of Khartoum, creating thousands of square miles of irrigated land, and drawing thousands of agricultural workers away from their villages. Many returned periodically to Darfur as seasonal migrants, but others settled permanently in Gezira state; there are now hundreds of thousands of Darfurians living in Central Sudan (Abdelkarim, 1991). De Waal (2005:53) describes his own experience in 1985 of witnessing the ebb and flow of hundreds of young men travelling to and from the Gezira Scheme, bringing with them large remittances which served to boost the Darfur economy.

Fig 3.5 Location of the Gezira Scheme

Source: http://www.sciencedirect.com
Furthermore, Daly (2010:210) observes the prevalence of West African economic migrants flowing into Sudan across the Darfur border in order to work on this irrigation scheme. Additionally, many returning pilgrims from Mecca were attracted by this offer of wage-labour, and were diverted from returning home in order to work on the scheme. All this motivated a trans-Darfurian movement of people to Gezira, whether from Darfur itself, or from countries further west. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2011:32) has recently grasped the extent of the scheme’s impact, and have substantially incorporated it into research on the effects of migration across Darfur, and across Darfur’s international borders.

A significant consequence of seasonal labour migration is a clear gender disparity in rural communities. An Oxfam study surveyed five thousand households in a region of Northern Darfur in the mid-1990s, and noticed a chronic shortage of men, with almost twice as many women as men. This ratio was reasoned to be on account of high levels of male out-migration looking for labour (Strachan & Peters, 1997:15). Furthermore, Tully (1988:33-35) recorded that in the 1980s among the Masalit tribe (who are predominantly sedentary farmers in Western Darfur) only 36% of families had a full-time resident husband/father “reflecting the effects of emigration, both temporary and permanent.”

De Waal (2005:141) asserts that the local economy is considerably dependent on “seasonal dispersal and long-term separation of spouses.” Seasonal labour migration, which falls under this paper’s definition of displacement, has a substantial impact on the livelihoods of Darfur communities.

(c) TRADE IN DARFUR

Darfur first came to prominence on account of long distance trade. In the 16th Century mention of Darfur appears for the first time in connection with trans-Saharan trade of Rhinoceros horn, ivory, ostrich feathers, and most importantly, slaves (Tully, 1988:152). Daly (2010:29) explains that “whether as cause or effect, control of long-distance trade is a salient feature of that expansion, and it is in connection with trade that the Fur state (c1660) began to appear in travellers’ and traders’ accounts.”. The Fur Sultanate can attribute its long-term durability to the power it received from control of the trade of slaves and other goods (O’Fahey, 2008:134). Trade was essential to Darfur, and with trade comes displacement of people, merchants and slaves.

Historically there were three important international trade routes in and out of Darfur, two of which are illustrated in Fig 3.6 (Daly, 2008:29). Most famous is the Forty-Day road, which connected Darfur to the Nile in upper Egypt; however during Mahdism (1885-1899) this route was closed (ibid:94). A second trade route emerged between Darfur and the Mediterranean through the Fezzan (modern day Libya), which is still very significant despite its inaccessibility. The third trade route is known as the Sudan Road, connecting West Africa with the Red Sea and passing through Darfur; this has become of greater consequence with the advent of Islam in West Africa, and the pilgrimage route to Mecca which paralleled this route.
Not only has trans-national trade been significant for the regular transhumance of merchants, but it has also bequeathed a framework for geographic fluidity and regular population movement which has facilitated a greater prevalence of people movement than merely trade could account for, exemplified by the frequency of labour migration along trade routes. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2011:25) explains that “Sudan has traditionally been a destination country for people arriving mostly from neighbouring countries and West Africa, which was facilitated by the existence of trading and pilgrimage routes.” Finally, Tully (1988:165-169) makes an insightful observation regarding local trade, which is often overlooked by other writers. He investigates the interface between international and regional trade, and contends that long-distance trade has in turn encouraged village merchants on a local level, “bringing the trade network virtually to the doorstep of their fellow villager.” Trade has motivated greater displacement on local, regional and international level in Darfur.

3.1.2 RELIGION

Religion in Darfur, which is almost ubiquitously found to be Islam, has had an impact on displacement on both the international and local level.

(A) INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Displacement due to religion on the international level has already been alluded to with reference to trade on the Sudan Road, taking Muslim pilgrims from West Africa to Mecca. This route was especially favoured by poorer pilgrims over the Mediterranean and trans-Saharan routes (Daly,2010:29). Hino (1986), concludes his examination of migration from West to East by stating emphatically that “Most immigrants [in Darfur] claimed their forefathers left West Africa for the purpose of the pilgrimage to Mecca” (ibid:34). The Jihadist movements in West Africa in the 18th Century stimulated increased pilgrimage, as well as the sending of Muslim missionaries (daa’i) along the same route through Darfur (Fisher & Fisher, 1970:17). The arrival of Sufism in the Sahel in the 16th Century was also significant, with Sufi mysticism propagating along the Sudan Road in both directions, and pilgrims making journeys to Sufi centres of learning and to burial places of Sufi saints (ibid). Both Sufism and Sunnism were thus disseminated along the Sudan Road pilgrimage route. This encouraged a hive of religious activity and energy across the Sahel. Darfur was also implicated in this and experienced some people movement and displacement as a result.
Islam also contributed to displacement on a local level. For many centuries, Islam offered the only form of education available in Darfur, and thus children were frequently sent to Koranic schools where they would undertake menial duties as servants in return for a rudimentary education in Islam (De Waal, 2005:53). These were invariably residential schools, where children would stay for a number of years before returning home. Oxfam’s 1997 survey recorded high levels of out-migration among children, on account of pursuing Koranic studies in different parts of Sudan (Strachan and Peters, 1997:15). The absence of an institutionalised education system combined with the long distances between Koranic schools has led to high levels of displacement among children.

3.1.3 FAMINE

The above socio-economic displacement motivated by pastoralism, trade and labour are all opportunistic in kind, in pursuit of positive outcomes. However, displacement has also frequently occurred in Darfur as a coping mechanism, in the hope of avoiding negative outcomes. To make too much of a distinction between these motivations would unhelpful and inaccurate - they cannot be easily separated. However, with this word of caution in mind, this section investigates the way in which displacement is observed as a response to shocks and stresses, especially that of famine.

(A) UNDERSTANDING FAMINE

Famine is traditionally defined as “Widespread food shortage leading to significant rise in regional death rates” (Blix et al., 1971). However, Sen (1981:38) claimed that this was an oversimplification, and reconceptualised famine with his focus on ‘entitlements’, claiming that food shortage was not necessary for famine. He defined it as “a particularly virulent form of starvation leading to widespread death.” De Waal (2005) went even further asserting that famine need not entail widespread death either, but that it is a social phenomenon with social implications, epitomised in Darfur’s case by mass displacement. Though outsiders might view famine as merely food shortage, those undergoing it (insiders) have a very different experience, and theirs should be the criterion for understanding famine. Thus Currey (1978) describes famine as a ‘community syndrome’. This is an important starting point, since during a famine the threat to individuals’ livelihoods is more immediate than the threat of losing life through starvation. Displacement as a result of famine therefore needs to be understood not so much as a desperate attempt at survival from death, but rather as an intentional and rational decision, and as a sustainable coping strategy for protecting livelihoods and avoiding destitution (De Waal, 2005).
(b) HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Some claim that traditional African communities are intrinsically resilient against famine and that famine is only a 20th Century phenomenon (Watts, 1983). However, there is strong evidence that famine has always existed in Darfur; famine has indeed been more frequent in recent decades, but there is a long historical precedent that comes with it, and with the precedent of famine comes the precedent of displacement (De Waal, 2005:61). There are many historical instances which reinforce this argument; perhaps the most remarkable being the series of atrocious famines that occurred between 1874 and World War One, in which the total population of Darfur halved as a result. De Waal (2005:62) explains that “today’s human geography of Darfur is to a great extent the outcome of the disruption of these years. The era stands as a landmark of suffering in the consciousness of people in Darfur, a backdrop against which subsequent events are seen.” The impact of famine-driven displacement during these years was felt everywhere, with the collapse of local government and the local economy, and with the intermingling of different tribes in an unparalleled manner in history, which explains today’s lack of mono-ethnic communities across Darfur. Zayadiya and Rezaigat Arabs moved to Kordufan, many Berti moved even further south, eastern Darfur was settled for the first time, some Zaghawa moved to Southern Darfur, the Fur and Masalit were scattered westwards, and some destitute communities even sold themselves to slavery. Daly (2008:110) recounts that Dar Masalit (in Western Darfur) lost two thirds of its entire population to migration. Furthermore the Masalit Sultan even abandoned the capital when its wells dried up and established a new capital at El Geneina. Unlike previous famines where most returned afterwards, in these decades of famine the displacements had permanence to them, with many settling in the places to which they had moved, rebuilding their villages and communities there (ibid:61,65-69).

(c) FAMINE NAMES

As a social anthropologist, De Waal (2005:73-77) examines the names by which these Darfur famines were remembered by different communities; these testify to the mass displacement they caused. Many famines are given names which infer large scale migration, such as Sanat Konsi (year at Konsi) and Saafar Mellit (Journey to Mellit), which describe the places to which people were displaced. Julu (Wandering) is another name frequently given to the famine, which describes the kinds of wandering.
which happens “alone, in search of food as a chicken does when it scours the ground for grains” (ibid:74). Similarly the name nitlaga (we’ll meet again) indicates the parting farewells spoken by people as they left their villages; this speaks of an expectation that they shall return in due course, which is only partially true. Nonetheless, famine is ingrained deep in the consciousness of every Darfurian, and displacement as a coping strategy is integral to this.

(D) PERMANENT DISPLACEMENT

The Zaghawa are a pertinent case study in understanding permanent displacement as a coping strategy. Daly (2010:189) records that many Zaghawa communities made permanent plans to relocate following the 1969/70 famines, and these were more widely implemented after the 1984/5 famine two decades later. De Waal (2005:92-98) observes the social transformation that Zaghawa communities underwent in the face of drought and famine in the post-independence years. Northern villages were completely abandoned as they moved south, with their social framework shifting dramatically as a result (and in recent years again by the war). This is characteristic of a constantly evolving society responding to the demands and challenges of the environment it inhabits. De Waal summarises: “Zaghawa are ready to migrate anywhere!” (ibid:97). Daly (2010:214) affirms that the displacement in the 80s had permanence to it: “most significantly, it did not reverse... People moved south to escape the drought and began to settle in large numbers on land to which Fur and Birgid farmers held customary title...” As described in the ethnography above, this would usually have resulted in tribal assimilation and a shift in ethnic identity, but the extent of it combined with the Arabisation agenda of the Government of Sudan caused problems to this process: “Arab migrants, although needy, were under no pressure to assimilate and were conscious of their power of numbers and access to the government.” It was into this new dimension of displacement and politicised tribalism that the Darfur rebellions took place.

(E) TEMPORARY DISPLACEMENT

The 1984/5 famine is also instructive for understanding temporary displacement as a coping strategy during famine. Large camps grew up outside towns across Darfur, and Daly (2010:232) attributed the high rates of mortality to disease brought on by transhumance, and not to starvation from lack of food. But towards the end of the famine, when food supply was at its most scarce, farmers from Northern Darfur left the camps and returned to their fields (De Waal, 2005); De Waal records that “squatter camps decreased in size and almost disappeared” (ibid:122). They had saved grain rather than eat it, and as the rains came they returned to their fields, reaping a record harvest in 1985. Thus, the displacement was only temporary for many who were determined to return to their livelihoods once the famine had abated.
3.2 POLITICO-MILITARY ANALYSIS

The Politico-Military Analysis investigates the role of displacement in Darfur in 1) conflict and 2) coercion; these are analysed in turn.

3.2.1 CONFLICT

Darfur has been witness to numerous conflicts over the past centuries. These conflicts have frequently been associated with widespread displacement, not only as an inevitable consequence with civilians fleeing the violence, but also as an integral part of the mobilising, training and maintaining of military personnel involved in the conflicts. Moreover, many of these conflicts have been initiated, incited and fostered across Darfur’s international borders, particularly by Chad and Libya, with Darfur fulfilling the function of being a refuge and a recruiting ground. The International Organisation for Migration emphatically states that Sudan has the highest number and highest percentage of IDPs in the world, and they attribute this almost entirely to forced migration as a result of war (IOM, 2011:33). Thus the historical occurrence of war in Darfur, and its associated impact on displacement, requires thorough examination in order to establish a proper context for understanding its current manifestation.

(A) MAHDISM

At the end of the eighteenth century, Darfur saw several decades of disputed rule, and frequent outbreaks of intense fighting. The vacuum left by the overthrow of the Fur Sultanate gave rise to multiple claimants contesting for power, and there followed an era of instability and chronic displacement (Daly, 2010:125). Flint (2008:10-11) explains that “it was a period of exceptional dislocation, hunger, forced migration and destruction... the forced displacement of that era leaves many land claims disputed to this day, notably from Arab groups who were relocated to Omdurman or fled to Chad.”

The brief re-establishment of the Fur Sultanate in 1898 was short-lived and in turn encouraged the mobilisation of opposition armies across the region. The pattern of the recruitment of civilians into armed forces which is prevalent today has its origins in this era, when thousands of rural farmers and pastoralists were drafted into resistance movements, thus involuntarily displaced from their homes (ibid:23). This resulted in major social and economic disruption. O’Fahey (2005:280) describes the corresponding collapse of traditional authority structures and economic livelihoods, promoting “complete chaos”. He shares witness accounts of the displacement: “such was the desolation of Darfur that we were scattered among the trees, wilderness and mountains... we stayed in swamps, forest and wilderness where none of us owned even a chicken” (O’Fahey, 2005:283). This speaks of widespread displacement not dissimilar to that which was experienced over one hundred years later in the current war.
Since Sudan’s independence in 1956, Chad and Libya have had a significant influence on Darfur. Gaddafi’s “Islamic Legion” was a mercenary army based in Libya with a ‘pan-African’ agenda to conquer neighbouring lands (Natsios, 2012:145). The army was predominantly made up of thousands of Darfurian Arabs, who were attracted by the ‘Arabism’ ideology and the financial rewards, and emigrated to Libya for military training. Natsios (ibid) attributes the prevalence of Darfurians in the Islamic Legion to the many socio-economic and climatic threats facing the Arab nomads of Northern Darfur. With a backdrop of overpopulation, overgrazing, and desertification, alongside changes in traditional land codes, Arab cattle herders were increasingly desperate about the slow destruction of their livelihoods. The Islamic Legion offered an escape route from potential destitution (ibid:54).

However, the Islamic Legion was eventually disbanded in the early 1990s, and Darfurian Arabs sent back to Darfur, having lost both their jobs in Libya and their homeland in Darfur. This had a considerable impact on the military landscape of Darfur in the twenty-first century, not dissimilar to that of the Tuareg’s return to Niger and Mali following the fall of Gaddafi’s regime in 2011, which provoked the Malian insurgence. Natsios is emphatic about the significant role this era played in shaping the political and ethnic climate of today: “[the Islamic Legion] didn’t simply disappear but instead turned into a ticking time bomb, waiting to explode in Darfur” (Natsios, 2012:72). These returning mercenary soldiers knew little of the traditional livelihoods of pastoralism and farming, and were equipped instead with thorough military training, automatic weaponry, and widespread disillusionment. Consequently, several Arab tribes allied together, forming the ‘Arab Gathering’, motivated in part by an ‘Arab Supremacist’ ideology, but more so as a pragmatic attempt at claiming land, “because the only way to establish a right to land was literally to occupy it” (Daly, 2010:216). This threatened several of the larger ‘African’ tribes (the Masalit, the Fur, the Zaghawa), provoking their respective militarisation and collaboration, which in turn threatened the Government of Sudan (Mamdani, 2009:120). This set the stage for the Third Darfur Rebellion in 2003; the Khartoum government chose to mobilise and arm the aforementioned ex-Islamic Legion militia groups to suppress the rebel uprising. They were responsible for the majority of the human rights abuses and ethnic cleansing (Flint, 2008:143). Thus the displacement of soldiers back to Darfur was a major cause of the war – displacement sets the backdrop for the war and is not just a result of it.

Perhaps of equal importance was the fluid movement and displacement of Chadian rebel groups in and out of Darfur between the 1970s and 1990s. Chadian rebels have consistently sought sanctuary in Darfur, both as a training ground and as a source of additional arms and recruits (Daly, 2010:199). Furthermore, the volatile relationship between Chad and Sudan over the past half-century has only served to exacerbate this, with each government intermittently supporting rebel group activities against the other. Chapter Two reminds us that the border between the two countries is notional;
an almost entirely political and arbitrary line drawn by politicians with little regard for the human geography of the region. The majority of Darfur tribes historically span the border. And tribal identity is of far greater importance than national citizenship – especially considering that under one per cent of Darfurians have a birth certificate, and only a fraction of that one per cent have a passport (Afrocenter, 2005). Locally, the border is not adhered to, with nomads, traders, refugees and soldiers moving freely across it. This has taken place over many decades, and has contributed significantly to the demographic fluidity of Darfur. Accordingly, Burr and Collins (2006) criticise political analysts and journalists for placing the Darfur War within the framework of Sudan’s other wars around its periphery (e.g. the North-South Civil War). Rather, they claim that it would be better explained as a spill-over from wars in Chad. All this reinforces the assertion that constant population flux and displacement across Darfur’s international borders is not just a phenomenal result of the war but an intrinsic cause of the war.

(C) PARALLELS IN HISTORY

The statistics regarding mass displacement in Darfur since 2003 are skewed. Undoubtedly the region has experienced a recent upheaval with many people displaced, but this is neither a unique phenomenon, nor is it as acute as the figures suggest. Firstly, it has occurred throughout the 19th and 20th century in Darfur as a result of violence and civil unrest; historically it is neither an exceptional nor a permanent event. Secondly, the purported numbers of those recently displaced chooses to agglomerate those who were displaced in previous unrelated conflicts with those displaced specifically as a result of the Third Darfur Rebellion, as well as including those for whom their displacement is not immediately correlated with the circumstances of the war. This distorts the findings and exaggerates the numbers (Seferis, 2010). Nonetheless, dozens of displacement camps have grown up outside towns and cities in Darfur and Chad; conflict always has been a major cause of displacement in Darfur, and as argued above, displacement has also been a major cause of conflict.

3.2.2 COERCION

Within the politico-military analysis of displacement arises the issue of coercive displacement, which manifests itself in Darfur in the form of slavery and of conscription, and in practice there is little to distinguish the two. The predominant conception of African slavery in the West tends to focus on the trade of slaves between west Africa and ‘the Americas’, with about twelve million slaves being transported across the Atlantic between the 16th and 19th centuries (Segal, 1995:4). However, less well-known but more prolific was the trade of slaves that existed between Africa and the Middle

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5 During a trip to Eastern Chad in April 2012, the author encountered many people who would routinely ‘hop’ the border, for hospital visits, family events, trade etc. Additionally, many of the Darfur refugees that the author knows in the UK fled Sudan via Chad, where they obtained Chadian passports, travelled to Europe and then destroyed their passports claiming Sudanese citizenship.
East, supplying Ottoman and Arab societies with even greater numbers of slaves. Approximately eighteen million African slaves crossed the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean or the Sahara to supply the slave-markets of North Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Hellie, 2012). Sudan, and Darfur in particular, played a central role in slavery, and consequently this contributed heavily to the frequency of displacement in Darfur’s history.

(A) DEFINING SLAVERY

There is a real danger of misapplying Western definitions of slavery to Africa cultures, where slaves had different rights, statuses and functions to those in Europe and America. Most importantly, slavery is far less rigidly defined in Islamic Africa; it is neither necessarily permanent nor involuntary, and slaves frequently earn wages, own slaves of their own, and exercise considerable freedom in their manner of living (Fisher,1970).

Categorisation therefore presents a major challenge to the analysis of slavery in Darfur, since it is far from straightforward to distinguish between slave and free (ibid:12). In fact, Tully (1988) records that during the Ottoman invasion of Darfur in the 18th century, the fleeing Fur communities surrendered themselves voluntarily to slavery as a security mechanism to ensure their survival and reincarnation within a different community. He explains: “it would appear that slavery was in part a way of incorporating members of other ethnic groups” (p23). Furthermore, Fisher (1970:34) proposes an intermediary category of people between volunteer and slave – those who, “[surrender] voluntarily during times of duress.” This often occurs when children from farming communities are offered to passing nomads, since they might otherwise die of starvation. Unquestionably slavery in Darfur looks different to the Western format, but nevertheless, it is a major cause of displacement, both historically and in the present day. In order to understand slavery’s role in displacement in Darfur, this paper investigates below (1) the thriving slave trade passing through Darfur, and (2) the incidence of slavery within Darfur itself.

(B) THE DARFUR SLAVE TRADE

Sudan has long been famous for its slaves – both as an export trade, and used within Sudan itself (Fisher,1970) – so much so that it has been described as “a country based entirely on slavery” (ibid:63). Darfur was inevitably implicated in this - many of its towns and cities initially developed around their slave markets. Buxton (2011) was an early explorer who estimated in 1840 that 15,000 slaves were traded annually from the Wadai region alone (one part of Darfur). The significance of the trade routes through Darfur have already been discussed with reference to displacement, but this is all the more salient with regards to the trade of slaves, since it represents forced migration on a mass scale occurring in Darfur for centuries past.
(c) SLAVERY IN DARFUR

Slavery was also very prevalent within Darfur society itself, as it was across the whole Sahel. Smith (1982) is an anthropologist and Africanist who wrote a seminal book called *Baba of Karo*, recording the memoirs of an old woman who describes endemic slavery across the Sahel, within the context of war: “there was always fear; war, war, war – they caught any man and they made him a slave, that was the way it was.” Warring tribes would commonly enslave their captives, only to experience enslavement themselves when defeated – as happened between the Masalit and the Mahdist forces in the 1980s (Kapteijns, 1985:51). Fisher (1970:63,9-10) acknowledges the strong domestic demand for slaves in Darfur; he describes rich families sometimes owning as many as a thousand slaves; Gordon of Khartoum estimated that two thirds of all Sudanese were enslaved; he reasoned that its abolition was therefore utterly impracticable since it would have completely crippled the economy (Natsios 2012:51). The pattern of slavery on a local level is entrenched in Darfur’s historical identity.

(d) CONSCRIPTION IN DARFUR

One particular facet of slavery in Darfur is conscription. This has occurred throughout history, but was of particular importance in Al-Zubayr’s successful conquest of Darfur and in the Ottoman’s consolidation of power in 1921 (Natsios, 2012:22). Furthermore during the Mahdist revolution Arab militia were compulsorily subsumed into the Mahdi’s army and were forcibly sent to Khartoum to fight (Daly, 2010:77). Whilst conscription does not technically fall within the bounds of slavery, in practice it is equivalent. Moreover similar practices are being employed by rebel groups and Arab militias in the Third Darfur Rebellion (Arabie, 2012).

(e) AN ON-GOING ISSUE

Fisher (1970:55) has ventured so far as to claim that the majority of population flow in Darfur was caused by slavery. Though an overstatement, this does reinforce the prominence of slavery in Darfur’s displacement history. Furthermore, Daly (2010:27) claims that the consequences of slavery are still felt today: “Darfur was a slave-owning and slave trading society in which religion, ethnicity and economic interests combined to create attitudes that survived long after slavery was officially abolished” (c.f. O’Fahey, 2005:139-140). Moreover, many have argued that slavery is still widespread in Darfur, both overt and covert, in the form of enforced patronage and extortionate social hierarchies (Fisher, 1970:51). The International Organisation of Migration sustains that slavery in Darfur is prevalent, with extensive human trafficking across national and international borders, meant for domestic servitude, combatants and sexual exploitation (IOM, 2011:47). The parallels between displacement and slavery are noticeable, and the historical centrality of slavery to Darfur’s economy, society and military emphasise the centrality of displacement to Darfur’s historic and current identity.
3.3 GEOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The Geographic Analysis of displacement in Darfur takes two different angles: 1) environment, and 2) demography. These are analysed in turn.

3.3.1 ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues in Darfur have already arisen as causes of displacement during the sections on pastoralism and famine, exemplifying the importance of understanding these categories for analysis as not mutually exclusive, but interdependent and interconnected as discussed earlier. However, the long-term changes in Darfur’s environment have likewise caused displacement of a more long-term nature, and therefore it merits an examination of its own. What follows is an analysis of (a) drought and (b) land degradation, which form the two major environmental challenges to Darfur’s livelihoods, and thus contribute most to displacement.

(A) DROUGHT

Annual rainfall has been declining in Darfur since records began in 1916; the rainy seasons are shorter and the patterns of rainfall are less predictable and sporadic. The Sahel region, defined approximately as the region receiving between 200mm and 700mm of rainfall per annum, is unquestionably moving southwards (see Fig. 3.8). Daly (2010:214) claims that this is the single most important reason for desertification – more significant, though not independent from, man-made problems such as deforestation, over-farming and overgrazing. Likewise, Tully (1988:48-55) is unequivocal about the long-term decline in rainfall, and likewise accredits this predominantly to

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**Fig. 3.8 Map and Graphs detailing the decline in rainfall in the Sahel**

The red dotted lines show the southwards movement of the isohyets between 1950 and 2005. Source: [http://www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)
nonhuman factors: changes in global weather patterns, shifts in volcanic activity in the Sahel, the effect of sunspot cycles, and the southward encroachment of the Sahara intensifying the reflectivity of the land which heats up the atmosphere and exacerbates the problem. He explains that it is part of historic long-term fluctuations in the Sahara’s southern perimeter; he asserts that 20,000 years ago the desert’s southern border was found several hundred miles further south than it is today, and that Darfur was entirely characterised by sand dunes with minimal vegetation and rainfall. Since then there has been a cyclical variability in the climate of Darfur.

Nevertheless, rapid environmental changes have taken place in Darfur during the twentieth century; infrequent heavy storms have increasingly replaced frequent light showers, indicating a pattern of rainfall more common in desert climates than the Savannah (De Waal, 2005:83). There is a widespread and deep-rooted consciousness across Darfur of the increasing frequency of drought, and the social upheaval that invariably follows (ibid:79). Natsios (2012:118) acknowledges the historic incidence of droughts in Darfur, leading to periodic and devastating famines, but he contends that those in recent decades have been different, causing social turmoil, mass displacement and subsequent political unrest on an unprecedented level. Contrary to the general trend, rainfall after 1971 did not continue to decrease further, and some have therefore conjectured that the climate alterations were not an immediate factor in the outbreak of war in 2003. Instead it is an implicit long-term factor, since the widespread displacement induced by the increasing pattern of droughts and decline in rainfall were responsible for destabilising society and inciting the war (Kevane & Gray, 2008).

(B) LAND DEGRADATION

Superimposed on these long-term weather patterns, recent changes of the past century in the form of land degradation and desertification have been both sudden and extremely destabilising. These are the result of human activities as Daly explains (2010:149):

“A report, in April 1944, warned of already uncontrolled degradation in the Darfur owing to woodcutting (for fuel), expansion of cropped areas, and increased well-digging. In pastoral areas, where wealth was measured in animals, demand for water and fodder must eventually outstrip supply, and the replenishment of aquifers, especially in areas of negligible rainfall, was probably slight or non-existent. There was, in order words, a hidden environmental time-bomb ticking, with those detecting it unable to direct policy and those in its blast area unable to postpone its explosion or mitigate its effects.”

The Neo-Malthusian undercurrents in this account are unhelpful, but nonetheless the core truth holds fast: Darfur has experienced decades of land degradation almost no attempts to address it. The combination of overgrazing, over-farming, deforestation and a southward moving desert boundary has severely affected livelihoods. Rapid population growth (discussed in the demography section) stimulated demand for more domesticated animals and higher agricultural yields, which created disequilibrium in the traditional management of the fragile pasturaleands of Darfur. In
addition to this, Darfur was the favoured destination of thousands of similarly threatened and desperate pastoralist communities from across the Sahel, who migrated to Darfur from Mali, Niger and Chad in the latter half of the twentieth century (Natsios, 2012:119). They brought their herds with them, resulting in unsustainable overgrazing of the land, which was the single biggest factor in the degradation of the land (Daly, 2010:149). Holy (1974) describes a slippery slope of environmental degradation, impoverishment and destruction of livelihoods, and every the coping strategy adopted by the community seems only to exacerbate the issue.

(c) IMPACT ON DISPLACEMENT

There are many conjectures about the interrelatedness of drought and land degradation, but regardless of the cause-and-effect, both are undeniably occurring side-by-side in Darfur (c.f. MacLeod, 1976; Charney, 1975; Swift, 1977). Furthermore, both have resulted in widespread displacement of communities, both as short-term coping mechanisms and long-term permanent livelihood adaptations. In previous centuries the human population of Darfur was able to adapt to climatic fluctuations: farmers shifted their cultivation patterns and pastoralists migrated to areas with better rains – these were integral parts of the regional social organisation (Lovejoy & Baier, 1976). There was an expectation that drought years would occur and the fluid exchange of goods and population between herders and famers ensured economic stability (Tully, 1988:53). Most importantly, there was no lasting damage done to the environment. However, in recent times responses to drought and land degradation have taken on more permanence:

“When failure of the 1940-41 crops and grazing brought migration southward of the northern tribes, officials noted what was assumed to be the normal response to a harsh environment that nomads had adopted since time immemorial. By 1945 they considered the migration as a permanent trend. (Daly, 2010:148-150).

Here the distinction between displacement in history as a temporary coping strategy and displacement today as a permanent livelihoods adaptation are elucidated. The decline of rainfall has affected the permanent movement of peoples, the permanent degradation of land, and permanent changes in the composition of society (Ibrahim, 1990). During continued periods of drought the concentration of the population around water sources has led to more permanent degradation and resource scarcity than was previously the case (ibid). Furthermore, the increased pressures have provoked localised conflicts between different tribal groups, which have become far more intractable with the advent of automatic weapons from Chad and Libya (O’Fahey, 2004:26). In such cases, “the only effective reaction to a long period of reduced rainfall is emigration by the population” (Tully, 1988:54).

Darfur has been substantially shaken up by changes in the environment, and there is ample evidence of this diasporic occurrence (Natios, 2012:70,118). Tully (1988:54) observes “enduring relationships between geographically separated peoples exists... The large number of linguistic groups that are composed of populations separated by hundreds of miles indicates the frequency of population..."
movements.” This explains in part the ethnographic diversity and complexity of Darfur, which in turn gives further credence to the extent to which displacement has historically proliferated in Darfur. There are now virtually no mono-ethnic settlements left in Darfur (Jok, 2007:125).

### 3.3.2 DEMOGRAPHY

Darfur’s demographic development has two major components: (a) natural population growth and (b) immigration, the former has stimulated displacement and the latter exemplifies displacement.

**(A) NATURAL POPULATION GROWTH**

The rate of population growth has significantly impacted displacement in Darfur. At independence in 1956, the population was only just over one million (Fadul, 2006:35), and now it stands between six and eight million (IDMC, 2011). Tully (1988:64) records that in Western Darfur the population quadrupled in just thirty years after independence, and this was only due to natural increase since immigration was discounted. High mortality rates do not rival fertility rates; children are highly prized in Darfur as a symbol of respect and an economic insurance mechanism. With this growth, there has been a corresponding exponential growth in the animal population and cultivation of land. This resulted in serious land stress, and also the tightening of land rights restricting households from expanding their landholdings (De Waal, 2005:47). The rapid population growth has therefore fostered the need for displacement, with insufficient local opportunities compelling younger generations to choose between poverty and migration.

**(B) IMMIGRATION**

The arrival of immigrants in Darfur not only represents displacement in its rudimentary form, but also contributes to the aforementioned internal overpopulation problem. O’Fahey (2005:6) documents its prevalence in history with the “slow movement by Arab nomads into and across northern and southern Darfur between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and their gradual coalescence into the modern tribal groupings.” During the same period, West African migrants (from Fulani and Hausa tribes) spread east and many settled in Darfur also (Daly, 2010:29). This has continued until today, but the twentieth century saw a particular resurgence in immigration into Darfur, so much so that for the first time in history Darfur ran out of vacant land for expansion (Tully, 66).

This immigration dynamic has developed some disturbing overtones since 2003. The Government of Sudan has actively encouraged Sahelian Arabs to settle in Darfur, promising them citizenship, pastureland and financial incentives (Natsios, 2012:187). Consequently, over a million Arab migrants have arrived in Darfur in the past decade, settling on land already belonging to the tribes who are presently seeking refuge in the displacement camps (ibid). The statistical evidence is conclusive: the 2009 national census has shown a forty per cent increase in the Arab population of Darfur compared
with only five per cent for the non-Arab population (ibid:119). This has rendered millions of Darfurians literally homeless; they are incapable of returning to their villages – not only because of their destruction but also because of their repossession by immigrant communities, with the full support of the government (ibid:191). This represents the crudest form of gerrymandering, motivated by the desire to assert political and electoral dominance over the non-Arab tribes of Darfur. Natsios describes it as Khartoum’s “single most irresponsible action in Darfur” since the outbreak of war (ibid:119).

The above accounts articulate displacement through historic and modern immigration dynamics. Daly summarises the ubiquity of this immigration-driven displacement:

“Other than the Sahara there are no geographical barriers to migration into and out of Darfur. The effect has been constant movement of people impelled by events elsewhere to move into the territory or reacting to local changes by moving within or without it. Even before the upheavals of the past twenty years, this resulted in an ethnographic map of great complexity, with overlays and disposessions, mass movements and gradual infiltrations, over a long period of time. Several general trends have been identified: from east to west, that is from the Nile valley westward into Kordufan and Darfur; from the northwest; and from West Africa, especially in more recent times.” (Daly, 2010:10).

This chapter has shown that displacement in Darfur, while manifesting itself in different ways, has been prevalent throughout the region and its history. The analysis of both the historical and current dynamics of displacement through the lenses of socio-economic, milito-political and geographic themes has enabled a context-specific understanding of the term, thus establishing a foundation of evidence which will provide the basis for the development of a new displacement paradigm for Darfur.
CHAPTER FOUR: DISPLACEMENT PARADIGM

This chapter builds on the previous two chapters by applying the historical and thematic analysis to the current circumstances in Darfur, encapsulating the outcome in a theoretical framework called the ‘displacement paradigm’. The objective of this chapter is therefore to develop the ‘displacement paradigm’ for understanding displacement in Darfur, and thus answer the corresponding research question: “how should displacement in Darfur be reconceptualised?”

4.1 THE PARADIGM

It has already been acknowledged that “responses to displacement risk being ineffective if the local context is not understood” (Second Problem, page 7). Accordingly the displacement paradigm is developed to facilitate a more holistic and context-specific understanding of the issues at hand, merging the historic with the modern and bridging the disparity between theory and practice. The scope is intentionally narrow, referring only to the Darfur context; this could be regarded as a limitation, since it cannot easily be applied to other contexts, but conversely its direct relevance to Darfur is a considerable strength as a purpose-built tool is far more applicable and useful for practitioners in Darfur than a general tool. The displacement paradigm can be condensed into the following six headline statements:
These six statements are loosely sequential, building on one another; they represent the backbone of the displacement paradigm and may be considered the core recommendations to be applied to development policy and practice resulting from this paper’s analysis of displacement in Darfur. This chapter expounds and clarifies each of the above statements by tackling the following three questions:

1. **Definition: How should Displacement in Darfur be Understood?**
2. **Explanation: Why has Displacement Occurred in Darfur?**
3. **Response: How should Displacement in Darfur be responded to?**

### 4.1.1 HOW SHOULD DISPLACEMENT IN DARFUR BE UNDERSTOOD?

This first question encapsulates the first two statements of the displacement paradigm. This paper has defined displacement as “forced or voluntary migration as a result of changing circumstances.” This has already been discussed and justified, but it is instructive to split this into two parts to
elaborate on its significance for the Darfur context: (a) Forced or voluntary – the internal motive; (b) The result of changing circumstances – the external stimulus.

(A) The internal motive

The first component speaks of the motive behind displacement, for which a simple dualism between forced and voluntary is not reasonable, since there are usually multifarious motivations which cover the broad spectrum between these two extremes. Any imposed boundary risks being arbitrary in its choice and dichotomising in its effect. Dawson and Farber (2012:115) comment on the impracticability of attempting to distinguish these two poles, and criticise efforts to do this: “scholars have honed in on discrete aspects or sub-topics of forcible displacement, leaving behind tracts that are rich in detail, but a landscape that is largely incomplete.” Furthermore, the predilection for establishing camps to manage displaced populations has tended to drive a speculative wedge between those forcibly displaced and those not (Harrell-Bond, 2000 & 2002). Natsios (2012:150) overturns this presumption by presenting evidence from Darfur that there is no sensible difference between them, and that membership to a displacement or refugee camp is generally determined by personal preference rather than the legitimacy of their flight.

It is refugee and internal displacement camps that invariably grab the attention of media, politicians and humanitarian agencies (IDMC, 2011). However, the displaced in Darfur are not limited to these people alone; there are millions of others, not included in official statistics and not visible to the media. They have experienced displacement also, but do not necessarily fall under the technical definition of ‘forced migrant’. Nonetheless, they have been impacted by changing circumstances and by the recent violence, and though their livelihoods needs are equally important, they are often neglected. Consequently, it is appropriate to maintain a wide-lensed definition of the displaced in Darfur when considering the macroscopic development agenda:

Displacement is the forced or voluntary migration as a result of changing circumstances.

(B) The external stimulus

The second component speaks of the external circumstances that stimulate displacement. These have been detailed in great depth in Chapter Three. This paper hypothesises that ‘displacement is intrinsic to Darfur’s history and identity’ and Chapter Three falls short of proving this to be incontrovertibly true; such an assertion is too subjective to be irrefutably surmised and too complex to be undertaken in such a short paper. Nonetheless, displacement has been demonstrated to occur with remarkable regularity and entrenchment throughout Darfur’s history.
It is now appropriate to incorporate into the historical analysis the most recent and on-going event that has incited mass displacement, which is the Third Darfur Rebellion. The war has directly or indirectly resulted in millions of displaced people, and has destroyed and damaged livelihoods across Darfur. The author has observed a common pattern in books about Darfur: they observe displacement occurring in Darfur’s history (as in Chapter Three) but fail to take this into account when assessing the current circumstances of displacement. However, today’s crisis parallels previous events in history and consequently it cannot be assessed in exclusion to its historical context (Daly, 2010:14). Accordingly, the changing circumstances that have caused displacement need to be set against the backdrop of the circumstances governing displacement in history. This summarises the hypothesis stated from the outset:

Displacement is intrinsic to Darfur’s history and identity.

A closing illustration of this arises from Darfur’s languaculture, which is pervaded by allusions to displacement. Their names for places and historical events, their rites of passage, their particular worldview, their collective memories, their value system – all these point towards displacement being deeply rooted in Darfurians’ identities (De Waal, 2005:50). For example the capital of Northern Darfur (Al-Fasher) means ‘camp’ denoting its intended impermanence; marriage dowries are always composed of livestock since portability is essential; many of the tribes’ names have a migratory component (e.g. Fur al Sayarra – migratory Fur); and even the renowned principle of the ‘dar’ (homeland) has an implied temporariness attached to it (Natsios, 2012:125). Daly (2010:11) affirms that in Darfur “the salient point is of fluidity and change, not stagnation and immemorially fixed positions geographically, socially and economically.”

Whilst these first two parts of the new displacement paradigm have been previously ascertained through the research presented in this paper, nonetheless it is worthwhile emphasising them in order to note the subtle re-conceptualisations that are required, and to ensure the completeness of the displacement paradigm.

4.1.2 WHY HAS DISPLACEMENT OCCURRED IN DARFUR?

(A) DISPLACEMENT NOT EXCEPTIONAL

The evidence in Chapter Three provides the reader with an awareness of the many ways in which displacement has been significant in Darfur long before violence erupted in 2003, which provoked the higher levels of displacement. This awareness logically renders the recent displacement as merely a continuation (and escalation) of a common occurrence in Darfur’s history and culture. Bakewell (2011:18) asserts that “the violent displacement of people from their homes cannot be
understood as a result of aberrations from a peaceful normality.” Though the current circumstances in Darfur are unique (see below), displacement is not. Displacement in Darfur must be understood within the context of constant population movement, stimulated by pastoral livelihoods, trans-Saharan trade, Muslim pilgrimage, drought and famine, slavery, war, and more. It is a standard coping strategy, as well as a livelihoods strategy, for building resilience and adapting to evolving circumstances.

The recent war has increased displacement, but there is nothing unique about the event of displacement itself. Such a perspective definitely does not negate the severity of human suffering or of destruction of livelihoods, but it does acknowledge that displacement is a recurrent manifestation and not an exceptional one. The recent change in displacement has been one of intensity and not of ontology; which motivates the next statement of the displacement paradigm:

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(b) Exceptional Circumstances

There needs to be attention paid to the difference between temporary displacement and permanent displacement. The analysis in Chapter Three documents examples of both. Temporary displacement includes instances such as pastoralist cyclical migration patterns, seasonal labour movements or short-term coping strategies reacting to conflict and drought; permanent displacement refers to relocation as a result of environmental degradation and climate change, or the export of slaves from Darfur, or the arrival of West African migrants to settle in Darfur. There is an inherent difference between temporary and permanent displacement.

The last few decades have seen an increase in permanent displacement. Daly (2010:214) describes the migration in response to the 1973 famine: “Most significantly, it did not reverse... People moved south to escape the drought and began to settle in large numbers on land to which [other tribes] held customary title.” He also comments that migration after the 1984/5 famine was permanent. (ibid:215). Likewise, the recent mass displacement has permanence to it. As described in Chapter Three, foreign immigrants have occupied the dispossessed land, and the trend of worsening drought and land degradation means that there is little possibility of reverting the events of the last ten years. The region has experienced a chemical reaction and not a physical reaction – it is not reversible (Natsios, 2012:146). Whatever the future holds for the displaced people of Darfur, it needs to be understood life will never return back to ‘normality’ as defined by pre-2003 standards. Displacement is not exceptional, but the circumstances surrounding the current displacement are exceptional, with the result that it is a permanent change rather than a temporary coping strategy for those who are displaced. This motivates the next statement of the displacement paradigm:
Here there is a stark contrast between current conceptions of displacement and the displacement paradigm. The former tends to frame displacement as an exceptional event which demands a reversion to a purported status quo (UNHCR, 2004). The displacement paradigm inverts this entirely, suggesting that there is nothing exceptional about displacement itself, but that the recent circumstances have rendered an attempt at restoring the old order of things completely impracticable.

4.1.3 HOW SHOULD DISPLACEMENT IN DARFUR BE RESPONDED TO?

The third and final part of the displacement paradigm addresses how displacement should be responded to, with particular reference to (1) attitude and (2) action.

(A) ATTITUDE TO DISPLACEMENT

The relationship between conflict and displacement is complex. It has already been suggested in Chapter Three that displacement was as much a contributing factor to the war as it is an outcome of the war; but perhaps the most accurate and helpful perspective is to appreciate displacement as part of the backdrop against which the war happened, and not as intrinsically negative or positive with regards to people’s livelihoods. The main problem in Darfur is not displacement but rather the war itself. When the war ends, displacement (with its broader definition) will not. Displacement is an integral part of adaptation to change and building resilience against shocks and stresses. Millions of people in Darfur have had their livelihoods destroyed and mass displacement is a stark manifestation of this, but it is instructive to clarify that displacement is not to blame, but is rather an indicator and a response. This is encapsulated in the fifth statement of the displacement paradigm.

This stands in contrast to the general rhetoric surrounding displacement, particularly in the media, which sees it as a problem to be solved and a tragedy in itself. The tragedy is the bloodshed and violence caused by the war; displacement can be part of rebuilding the lives affected.
(b) ACTION AND APPLICATION

The non-reversible nature of the recent displacement in Darfur has already been expounded in the previous section, which impacts on the type of development response that is required. The aforementioned tendency to seek the restoration of an idealised status quo is symptomatic of a philosophy of history that supposes a cyclical pattern instead of a progressive one. Fisher et al. (2000) have written at length about the difference between conflict resolution and conflict transformation, and it is appropriate to adapt it here with reference to displacement. Accordingly, ‘displacement transformation’ seeks “to transform [displacement] into positive social and political change” (ibid:7-10). Contrastingly, displacement resolution conceives of displacement as a disruptive event that needs reverting to the status quo. Admittedly displacement in Darfur does require a degree of resolution; but much more important is to work on meeting the livelihood challenges of Darfurians through displacement transformation – such an approach is far more holistic, dynamic and sustainable (Fisher, 2004:37). The difference between resolution and transformation are illustrated in the following diagram:

![Displacement Resolution and Displacement Transformation Diagram](image)

**Fig. 4.1 Displacement Resolution and Displacement Transformation**

This motivates the sixth and last statement in the displacement paradigm, which is an appeal to not just treat displacement as the problem but also as part of the solution. Alongside this is the appeal to have a holistic definition of displacement to include all those people affected and not merely those who are conspicuous on account of being registered in a camp. This is summarised as follows:


Thus a new paradigm has been developed for understanding displacement in Darfur. This re-conceptualisation is by no means definitive or exhaustive, but it is hoped that it will be informative, and that it will influence the approach of, and offer some recommendations to, development
practitioners in Darfur. This displacement paradigm is summarised in its six statements below, and then the next section presents a critical reflection on its validity and its value.

1. Displacement is forced or voluntary migration as a result of changing circumstances.
2. Displacement is intrinsic to Darfur’s history and identity.
3. The recent displacement in Darfur is not an exceptional event.
4. The recent circumstances impacting displacement in Darfur are exceptional.
5. Displacement is not responsible for the destruction of livelihoods in Darfur.
6. The response to displacement in Darfur requires transformation rather than resolution.
4.2 CRITICAL REFLECTION

The displacement paradigm has made some very strong statements about the nature of displacement in Darfur. Therefore, a subsequent critical reflection on the displacement paradigm’s validity and value is appropriate. These can be addressed by answering the following questions:
(a) Is it so? (b) So what?

(A) VALIDITY - IS IT SO?

This paper has conceded from the outset that its assertions are just one facet of a particularly complex issue (like one part of the elephant), and therefore neither comprehensive nor conclusive. The extent to which this part is accurately representative of the whole cannot be evaluated without a proper consideration of the other parts, and of their combination; such an investigation is beyond both the aim and the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper was not to establish an objective and absolute position on displacement in Darfur (if such a thing exists), but instead to proffer an insightful angle on displacement in Darfur with reference to a historical and cultural analysis. This it has largely accomplished.

Attempts at broadening the scope to include an exhaustive multi-dimensional analysis of displacement is definitely too complex to be accomplished within the limits of this paper, and probably too idealistic to be accomplished at all! It is better to evaluate the validity of the displacement paradigm against the initial research question that it was seeking to answer: How should displacement in Darfur be reconceptualised? The displacement paradigm has reconceptualised displacement in Darfur with substantive validity with reference to content – it has accomplished what the research question demanded. However, the truth of its necessity (as required in the research question) is contingent on the legitimacy of Chapter Three’s analysis, which has not yet been judiciously reviewed; consequently the specific question of whether displacement should be reconceptualised as supposed remains unresolved.

(B) VALUE - SO WHAT?

So if this paper makes no claim of completeness in its analysis and is therefore unable to propose concrete conclusions, it is now reasonable to ask the question: what is the displacement paradigm useful for?

Firstly, it is useful for stimulating further academic discourse. Complex scenarios require creative thinking and innovative approaches; new conjectures require reviewing, refining and field testing before they can be vindicated, or entirely rejected. What has been offered here is a change of perspective, and it is hoped that this will be valuable in influencing and stimulating dialogue, debate and further research concerning displacement in Darfur. Secondly, it is valuable for informing development policy and practice. The displacement paradigm cannot yet be relied upon as entirely rigorous, but it is not intended to be a thorough methodology so much as an approach, which can be applied to assorted different situations. The final section will briefly touch upon one of these situations by means of conclusion.
4.3 APPLICATION

There are many ways in which the displacement paradigm can be applied, but only one is mentioned here, as the paradigm’s application is not the explicit focus of the paper, but the responsibility of future research to explore. This brief example however focuses on the management of displacement camps and the underpinning assumptions about the nature of displacement that it reveals.

Darfur’s mass displacement both internally and internationally has become a ‘protracted refugee situation’, defined as “a refugee population of 25,000 persons or more has been living in exile for five years or longer in a developing country” (UNHCR, 2004; United Nations, 2006). A proliferation of displacement camps have sprung up in Darfur and neighbouring Chad. The current situation is not sustainable – by one estimate, 120,000 tonnes of food are required per annum, but only 52,000 tonnes are available (Daly, 2010:191); accordingly it was called “the world’s worst humanitarian crisis” in 2004 by the United Nations (African Arguments, 2009). However, the pervading attitude towards the displacement is to hold people in limbo until circumstances have reverted enough for them to return home (UNHCR, 2004). This was typified in the frequent conversations that the author remembers having in 2012 with refugees from Darfur in Eastern Chad, whose first questions were invariably: “When are we going home?” There was a strong expectation of repatriation, but as has been shown above this is not achievable due to the nature of the long-term circumstances in Darfur. There is a lack of focus on naturalisation (for refugees) and livelihoods adaptation (for the internally displaced), despite the fact that the evidence presented above suggests that both are consistent with the history and the culture, and that ethnicity is better defined by citizenship than by ancestry.

However, there is also a political motive at work here that needs consideration: camps provide a visible platform for the international community to pressure the Government of Sudan, and campaign for a swift resolution to the war and their safe return (Hathaway, 1995:291). The unfeasibility of this demand does not take away from the political leverage that it achieves. As mentioned before, media, politicians and development agencies usually frame displacement as an exceptional event which demands a restoration to how things used to be (UNHCR, 2004). The displacement paradigm has shown the spuriousness of such an assertion, instead affirming that displacement itself is not exceptional, but that the recent circumstances are exceptional. Therefore there is a need to anticipate how displacement can be transformed and redeemed, acknowledged and employed as a tool for rebuilding livelihoods, and building resilience and capacity. The displacement paradigm provides camp management with a new lens through which to conceptualise of the challenges facing people. Furthermore, Daly warns of a turning of international opinion about Darfur:
“Donors are tired of paying hundreds of millions of dollars a year to feed people and maintain the camps... Many refugees would like to settle permanently in the camps if they could be converted into urbanised neighbourhoods. Given that the countryside is increasingly incapable of supporting farming and herding, this solution is not far-fetched... The question is whether the IDPs can find livelihoods to support themselves in an urbanised environment without permanent dependency on international aid.” (Daly, 2010:233).

This is a pertinent question, and helpfully turns the attention away from displacement and towards the greater livelihoods challenges facing displaced peoples. Displacement is not unique, but the current suffering is, and this requires sustainable strategies for its alleviation.


Young, H. et al. (2009). *Livelihoods, power and choice: The vulnerability of the Northern Rizeygat, Darfur, Sudan*. Medford MA: Tufts University.