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PARADOX OF ARABIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON DARFUR, SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the intricate dynamics of Sudan's Arabization and Islamization policies and their profound implications for the Darfur region, offering insights into the roots of Arab ethnic supremacy and its troubling manifestation in ethnic cleansing. Through the lens of social categorization theories, our objective is to unravel the complexities of post-British Sudanese identity politics and its intersection with the tragedy unfolding in Darfur. Employing a qualitative methodology, we draw upon a rich tapestry of secondary sources and qualitative data gleaned from interviews with Sudanese and Darfuri residents. Adhering to stringent ethical standards, we safeguard participant anonymity and ensure the integrity of our data. The findings reveal the poignant paradox of the 'Black Arab who is anti-Black,' shedding light on the intricate interplay of race, identity, and power dynamics within Sudan's complex social fabric. The findings foster a deeper understanding of the injustices perpetuated in Darfur, advocating for reconciliation, social justice, and enduring peace in Sudan.

Keywords: Arabization, identity politics, ethnic cleansing, Darfur, Sudan.

INTRODUCTION

Since gaining independence on January 1, 1956, Sudan has struggled to define and defend its national identity amid complex socio-political dynamics. The country's intergroup conflicts and ethnic tensions are rooted in historical, political, and socio-economic factors shaped by both its colonial past and post-colonial developments. This paper examines the impact of Sudan's Arabization policies on the Darfur region, using social categorization theories to analyze their implications. Central to this study is the paradox of the 'Black Arab who is anti-Black,' a phenomenon that highlights the complexities of race and identity in Sudan, shaped by a colorist social hierarchy and the perceived supremacy of Arab identity. Essentially, this paper assesses the Darfur conflict through the framework of Arab identity and

the ideological underpinning of Arab supremacy in Sudan. With this in mind, the research seeks to address the following key questions: What are the policies and objectives behind Sudan's *ta'arib* (Arabization)? What drives the notion of Arab ethnic supremacy, and how does it manifest into ethnic cleansing in Darfur?

The discussion begins by providing an overview of Sudan's post-Anglo-Egyptian rule, assessing the legacy of British colonialism on the country's leadership and identity formation. The analysis then turns to Sudan's Arabization policies of Sudan under different regimes, and their direct impact on Darfur and the evolving role of Khartoum's military in these processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sudan's process of *ta'arib* (Arabization) has closely followed patterns of civil conflict across the country, most notably in Darfur since the early 2000s. The concept of *ta'arib* encompasses both linguistic and ethnic transformations (Sharkey, 2008). According to Sharkey (2008), this shift - from an African Sudanese identity to the Arab Sudanese one - reflects historical attitudes toward slavery and the socially constructed hierarchy that places Arabness at the top. The deep-seated association between Sudanese identity and slavery proved difficult to erase. As a result, the term 'Sudan' did not gain full acceptance among the Arab elites (Hashim, 2007). Some even proposed renaming the state *Sennar* to avoid an explicit connection to blackness, as 'Sudan' literally translates to "the land of the Blacks" (Thoba, 2021). This tension between African and Arab identities has been described by Muhammed Al Makki Ibrahim as "the product of historical cross-pollination," giving rise to an Afro-Arab identity. However, prevailing attitudes still frame Arabness and Africanness as mutually exclusive. Aguda (1973) argues that Sudan has successfully positioned itself as an Arab state in the global arena due to Arab dominance in culture, politics, administration, and commerce, effectively rendering it an Arab de facto state – often at the expense of its African heritage.

The constructed dichotomy between African Southerners and Arab Northerners is rooted in British colonial policies. As Thoba (2022) notes, the British viewed the Southern populations as culturally deficient and, therefore, more accessible targets for religious conversion. British colonialism reinforced Arab identity and culture by portraying Arabs as more advanced and civilized compared to Southerners. Some scholars suggest that the British policies sought to undermine Southerners as a means of facilitating resource extraction while simultaneously limiting Northern influence by closing borders and deploying English-speaking Christian missionaries to the South (Ylonen, 2017). This division was further reinforced in 1922, when the British imposed a policy isolating the South from the North, consolidating the distinctions between the two regions. These colonial strategies not only shaped Sudan's racial and ethnic landscape but also intensified existing hierarchies and power dynamics.

Contrary to the claim that Arab supremacy and Arabization were purely colonial constructs, Hashim (2004) argues that colorism and racial hierarchies in the Arab world predate British influence, tracing back to pre-Islamic times. Arabic poetry from that era frequently contained racialized and derogatory themes about blackness. By the end of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Arabic term for 'black' (*abd*) had become synonymous with 'slave', much like how the term 'nigger' came to be associated with slavery in Western languages.

This historical entrenchment of racial stratification set the stage for what may be described as the paradox of the 'black Arab who is anti-black.' Hashim (2004) highlights how Arabized Sudanese in

central Sudan often reject African identity, despite embracing African heritage when engaging with the West. However, both consciously and subconsciously, intermarriage with lighter-skinned individuals remains a preferred means of ‘purifying’ Sudanese blood from Africanness. Consequently, many ethnically African Sudanese relinquish their languages and identities in favor of Arab cultural assimilation. This process has fostered a new ideological and terminological consciousness of race and color. Bender (1983) categorizes these racial classifications into three historical groupings: *macro-black*, *red-brown*, and *white*. Expanding on this framework, Hashim explains that lighter-skinned black individuals were identified as Arabs and referred to as *wad balad* “son of the land”, while darker-skinned Sudanese were labeled as Africans, often with connotations of slavery. Meanwhile, those with distinctly lighter complexions were derogatorily called *halabi* (meaning “gypsy”). A Sudanese Arab proverb encapsulates this racial hierarchy: “The slaves [Blacks] are second class, but the *halab* [lightskins] are third class.”

Sudan’s complex racial and ethnic landscape, shaped by centuries of Arabization, colonial interventions, and socio-political hierarchies, has posed enduring challenges for nation-building and intergroup integration. These tensions have played a pivotal role in shaping conflicts in South Sudan and Darfur—an issue that warrants a deeper historical examination.

Theoretical Framework: Social Categorization Theories

Social categorization is a fundamental cognitive process through which individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on shared characteristics, such as race, gender, age, or occupation. This process simplifies the social world by organizing it into meaningful categories, enabling individuals to navigate complex social environments efficiently. However, it also underpins the formation of stereotypes, prejudice, and intergroup bias, making it a central focus of social psychology.

Reimer et al. (2020) discuss, theories of intergroup conflict typically fall into two categories: the “prejudice” model, which attributes conflict to individual biases, and the “realist” model, which sees conflict as competition over power and resources. However, an alternative explanation—self-categorization theory—suggests that individuals form identities based on shared traits, leading to an “us” vs. “them” dynamic.

One of the foundational theories of social categorization is *Social Identity Theory* (SIT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). SIT posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. According to this theory, people strive to maintain a positive social identity by favoring their in-group over out-groups, a phenomenon known as in-group bias. This bias can lead to stereotyping and discrimination, particularly when group boundaries are salient and competition for resources exists.

Building on SIT, *Self-Categorization Theory* (SCT), proposed by Turner et al. (1987), emphasizes the fluidity of social categorization. SCT suggests that individuals can shift their self-concept depending on the context, aligning themselves with different social categories at different times. For example, a person may identify strongly with their professional group at work but prioritize their ethnic identity in a cultural setting. This theory highlights the dynamic nature of social identity and its dependence on situational factors.

Another influential perspective is the *Minimal Group Paradigm*, introduced by Tajfel et al. (1971), which demonstrates that even arbitrary and minimal distinctions between groups can trigger in-group

favoritism and out-group discrimination. This paradigm underscores the ease with which social categorization occurs and its powerful impact on intergroup behavior.

More recent developments, such as the *Common Ingroup Identity Model* (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), propose strategies for reducing intergroup bias by recategorizing distinct groups into a single, inclusive superordinate group. This approach has been applied in diverse settings, from workplace diversity initiatives to conflict resolution, with the aim of fostering cooperation and reducing prejudice.

In short, social categorization theories provide critical insights into how individuals perceive and interact with social groups. While these processes are essential for cognitive efficiency, they also have profound implications for intergroup relations, highlighting the need for strategies to mitigate their negative consequences. These theories are useful in analyzing how the Sudanese government has seen the people of Dar Fur as ‘other’ and imposed its preferences on them to maintain political and economic control.

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative research approach, relying on secondary sources such as scholarly journal articles, books, reports, and other academic resources. Additionally, it incorporates primary data from interviews conducted with Sudanese and Darfuri residents. Interviews were conducted just before the outbreak of the civil war, using the snowball sampling method to reach participants. This research adheres to ethical standards in data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations, including anonymity and confidentiality, were strictly maintained for all participants to ensure their privacy and safety.

DISCUSSION

Historical Background of British Influence in Sudan

The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899 and 1956) played a significant role in shaping Sudan’s socio-political landscape. Although the governing decree theoretically shared sovereignty between Sudan, Egypt’s Khedive, and the British Crown, in practice, there was no equal partnership in ruling Sudan. The administration treated what is now South Sudan differently from the more economically developed North. According to Lin (2018), this policy aimed to protect the South from potential exploitation by the North.

In the 1920s, a “native administration” policy was introduced in both the Northern and Southern provinces. It relied on principles of customary law enforced through local chiefs, fostering the development of distinct customs in the South that remained largely uninfluenced by Islam. These differences were further reinforced by the 1922 Closed Districts Ordinance, which required permits for traveling between the two regions, specifying the purpose of such visits. Additionally, a Language Policy was implemented in South Sudan in 1928, designating English as an official language alongside the tribal languages of the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Zanda, while systematically rejecting Arabic (Teny-Dhurgon, 1995). The isolation of the South had significant consequences for colonial development, particularly in the spread of Christianity. The region became a focal point for missionary activities, as the British perceived Southern communities as culturally deficient and therefore more receptive to conversion (Thoba, 2021).

In 1930, the colonial administration introduced the Southern Policy, based on two premises: that the Negro Africans of the South were culturally and racially distinct from the Northerners, and that the Southern provinces would either develop a separate identity or integrate into British East Africa (Wai, 1980). The policy sought to establish a non-Arabic administrative and clerical staff, recognize African customary laws, regulate Northern traders in the South, and recruit soldiers from the region to replace the Arab troops. However, the most valid criticism of the Southern Policy is that it did not prioritize the South's economic and social development as it did in the North. Instead, it deepened the divide between the regions, and when eventually abandoned, it left the South more vulnerable than ever to domination by the North. This policy laid the groundwork for future conflicts by fostering separate identities.

The final phase of constitutional development began in 1943, when the North Sudan Advisory Council Ordinance was enacted to prepare Northern Sudan for independence. Covering Khartoum, Kordofan, Darfur, the Eastern and Western Provinces, and the Blue Nile province, this temporary constitution established the necessary framework for democratic self-governance. Meanwhile, the administration financed social service projects, including the construction of hospitals and schools.

The exclusion of Southerners from Northerners in Sudan was part of Britain's infamous "divide and conquer" strategy, administratively separating North and South Sudan and fostering cultural divisions, yet this realization came too late. The former President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, famously stated: "When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and they had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible." The same sentiment applies to South Sudan.

The ultimate betrayal of the Southern peoples at the hands of the British occurred in December of 1946, when the Civil Secretary of the Sudan government issued a memorandum announcing the abandonment of the Southern Policy. This decision decreed that Sudan would be administered as a single country, effectively leaving the Sudan at the mercy of the North. Despite British policies having created the initial separation, the colonial administration failed to uphold its political and moral responsibility to provide the safeguards previously promised to Southerners (Okeny, 1991). The Sudanese government subsequently asserted that the South was distinctly African, but that geography and economics bound it to the North as an equal partner - despite Southerners having been excluded from the decision-making process entirely (Wai, 1980).

Darfur in Context

Darfur has maintained a distinct identity due to a combination of Fur conquests and its natural boundaries. To the North, it merges with the Libyan desert, while to the East, mountains form a natural barrier against Kordofan, one of Sudan's 18 states. Internally, the region is divided into three distinct zones: the north, home to nomadic, camel-owning Arab Bedouins; the mountainous center region, primarily inhabited by land cultivators; and the southern belt, where the nomadic cattle herders reside (Lampen, 1950).

The Fur tribes ruled Darfur from approximately 1640 to 1916, and the term *Fur* was used by the Keira clan to describe the region's dark-skinned inhabitants. Over time, the prefix *dar* was added, and *Darfur* came to mean "the home of the Fur." While the Fur people remain the largest ethnic group in the region, they are estimated to constitute only about 27% of the population. Although Darfur fell under the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, in practice, the British delegated authority to existing local leaders - provided

they were loyal and competent - in order to maintain stability and reduce administrative costs (Waal, 2022).

Due to its long history of migration and intermarriage, Darfur is home to a diverse array of racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Its reputation for civil conflict is largely attributed to deep-rooted regional, political, and economic inequalities that have persisted throughout both colonial and post-colonial history. For much of the twentieth century, the abundance of fertile land allowed settlers to adhere to the customary laws of the dominant group, which controlled access to land and power. Under British colonial rule, land distribution was modified through the use of native administration, which assigned land to residents based on territorial governance (Sakainga, 2009). This system functioned effectively for decades until the 1980s when an unprecedented drought led to famine. Because Darfur's inhabitants depended heavily on agriculture and livestock, environmental changes and shifting land ownership patterns triggered conflicts between nomadic cattle herders and sedentary farmers. Akasha (2013) argues that the Darfur conflict was fundamentally driven by competition over scarce resources. However, this perspective fails to explain why Khartoum would become militarily involved in the region, nor does it justify the massacres that ensued.

An alternative explanation for the conflict in Darfur is the Sudanese government's longstanding neglect of the region and its African population. When repeated demands for improved infrastructure, roads, hospitals, and schools were ignored, African rebel groups launched an insurrection, attacking a government post in Darfur. In response, the Sudanese government armed Arab militias, launching a brutal military campaign that indiscriminately targeted not just the rebels but all non-Arab populations in the region. According to a Human Rights Watch report, West Darfur was the first to be attacked by a Russian-built helicopter, followed by coordinated assaults on seven different Fur villages. These attacks followed a systematic pattern: killing, followed by looting. Eyewitnesses recounted harrowing acts of brutality, including men being tied to camels and dragged, deliberately trampled by horses and vehicles, and hung from trees.

A central aspect of this genocidal Part of this genocidal campaign was the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war. A survivor from the Disa tribe recalled:

“I was taken away by the attackers. During the day, we were beaten, and they told us: ‘You, the Black women, we will exterminate you. You have no God.’”

Her testimony echoes hundreds of similar accounts, all describing systematic assaults carried out by the Khartoum-backed Janjaweed, with the explicit objective of ethnically cleansing Sudan of its African populations. Another survivor recalled: “The soldiers said: ‘Kill the men, kill the baby boys, rape the beautiful girls.’”

These massive human rights violations continued beyond 2004, despite Sudan's declaration of victory over Darfur. Reports persisted of extrajudicial executions, civilian shootings, abductions, the destruction of homes and farmland, cattle looting, and forced displacement (Amnesty, 2004). Hagan et al. (2005) theorized that this genocidal violence was driven by hierarchical racial and ethnic competition for absolute political and social dominance. The systematic use of rape not only spread terror but also symbolically sought to erase Darfur's *Africanness*, ensuring that future generations in the region would be less African and more Arab.

Ethnic Cleansing in Darfur

Historically, the United Nations has been cautious in applying the term “genocide”, often opting for classifications such as “ethnic cleansing” or “genocidal acts” to avoid triggering its legal obligation to intervene. Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Under this framework, states are obligated to prevent, prosecute, and hold perpetrators accountable. While the UN Charter references “disputes” “situations,” and “threats or breaches to peace,” it notably avoids the term “conflict”, which sociologists define as opposition among social entities competing for a resource that is insufficient to satisfy all (Quincy, 1957).

The term “ethnic purge” first appeared in Soviet discourse in 1988 to describe the forced removal of Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh, later evolving into “ethnic cleansing.” This terminology was subsequently adopted by observers of the Serbian massacres, eventually permeating UN reports, diplomatic rhetoric, and policy discussions (Ringrose, 2020). By sidestepping the label of genocide, states evade moral and legal responsibility for intervention, reinforcing a pattern of inaction seen in cases like Rwanda.

Despite its widespread use, “ethnic cleansing” has not been codified as an independent crime under international law, and its precise legal definition remains ambiguous. The most comprehensive attempt to define it came from the United Nations Commission of Experts investigating violations in the former Yugoslavia, which described ethnic cleansing as “rendering an area ethnically homogenous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of a given group” (UN, n.d.). The Commission outlined coercive methods such as murder, torture, arbitrary arrest, sexual violence, severe physical harm, indiscriminate military assaults on civilians, and widespread looting – tactics that undeniably characterize the situation in Darfur.

Applying these definitions to Darfur, the intent behind Khartoum’s military intervention remains a point of contention, as no official documentation explicitly calls for the complete eradication of Darfur’s ethnic groups. In a 2005 report, a UN commission concluded that Sudan had not pursued a “policy of genocide,” though government officials had committed acts “with genocidal intent.” The Commission also found evidence of war crimes and several human rights violations perpetrated by militias linked to the government (ReliefWeb, 2005). Despite this conclusion, the Bush administration interpreted the situation differently. A 2007 White House statement asserted: “The people of Darfur have suffered at the hands of a government that is complicit in the murder, bombing, and rape of innocent civilians. My administration has called these actions by their rightful name: genocide.” The International Criminal Court (ICC) subsequently issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir in 2010, charging him with crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide (ICC, 2021).

A fundamental question persists: did labeling Darfur a genocide lead to substantive international intervention? While the UN condemned Sudan and demanded the withdrawal of militias, no effective enforcement followed. In April 2006, the U.S. imposed targeted sanctions on individuals and entities deemed threats to Darfur’s stability, citing UN Security Council resolutions (OFAC). However, these measures had little tangible impact. The selective application of terminology by global institutions serves more to shield political interests than to protect vulnerable populations. Ultimately, the scale of human suffering in Darfur should not be contingent on satisfying a strict legal definition – it should compel decisive and immediate international action regardless of nomenclature.

Sudan's Arabization Policy Towards Darfur

As previously discussed, the postcolonial elevation of Arabic and Islam in Sudan was inherited from colonial structures that had served the material interests of the British. The dominance of Arabic as the primary medium of communication in Northern Sudan led to its politicization and the systematic Arabization and Islamization of Sudanese governance. Although Omar Al Bashir is often credited with aggressively advancing Sudan's Arab-Muslim identity, he was not the first to do so. His policies built upon a legacy established by earlier leaders, who actively promoted Arabization and Islamization as tools of state control.

The roots of this process can be traced to the Mahdist movement, which overthrew the Turco-Egyptian administration in 1885 and sought to spread Islam to Southern Sudan. However, this effort met significant resistance from Southern ethnic groups, who had been targeted by British Christian missionary campaigns. The first Sudanese leader to institutionalize Arabization and Islamization through state mechanisms was General Ibrahim Abboud, who seized power in 1958. His administration used military force, financial incentives, and policy decrees to extend Arab-Muslim influence over the South. In 1957, the Department of Religious Affairs was established to ensure that educational programs aligned with Islamic doctrine, accelerating the spread of Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim regions. State funds were directed toward building *khalwas* and *ma'ahads* (Quranic schools), which all children - regardless of religious background - were required to attend. Since these institutions primarily taught Islamic principles, Arabic was mandated as the language of institution to facilitate religious education. Abboud's administration openly stated that "the South must be Arabized and Islamized in order to achieve a political unity of Sudan" (Poggo, 2002). This belief set the foundation for the fusion of Arab-Muslim identity with Sudanese political structures.

Aguda (1973) argues that in Sudan, Arabic identity is not solely determined by lineage but by the extent to which individuals have absorbed Arabic-Islamic culture. While racial categories remain significant, cultural assimilation has historically taken precedence in determining one's place within Sudan's social hierarchy. Under Abboud's rule, language policies were enforced across government and educational institutions, barring Southerners who could not speak, read, or write Arabic from holding bureaucratic positions. These policies ensured that Arabization and Islamization became not just cultural imperatives but prerequisites for economic and political inclusion.

Following Abboud, Gaafar Al Numeiri came to power through a coup in May of 1969 and initially sought to stabilize Sudan by signing the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the First Sudanese Civil War. However, in September 1983, he abruptly reversed course by imposing Sharia Law as the foundation of Sudan's legal system. This declaration was marked by a dramatic public display - pouring \$5 million worth of liquor, beer, and wine into the Nile River (AP, 1983). The imposition of Sharia alarmed many Sudanese, particularly Southerners Christians, and secular Muslims, as it introduced punishments such as executions, amputating for theft, and stoning for adultery (Joffe, 2009).

Numeiri's move, however, was not purely ideological; it also served a strategic purpose. By enforcing Islamic law, he aimed to counterbalance the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalist groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, which had gained prominence after the reconciliation between North and South in 1972. The rise of religious extremism was most visible in Sudanese universities, where an Islamic Direction movement, heavily funded by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Faisal Islamic Bank, gained control of student unions. Although conflicts in both Darfur and the South

predated the implementation of Sharia, Numeiri's policies intensified existing tensions by deepening the cultural subjugation of the non-Muslim South under Northern Arab rule (Jacobs, 1985).

The Arabization-Islamization project accelerated under Omar Al Basir, who seized power in a 1989 military coup orchestrated by the National Islamic Front (NIF). Al Bashir's rise would not have been possible without the backing of Hassan Al Turabi, a key figure in the Muslim Brotherhood who framed Sudan's Islamic transformation as a military-led initiative to avoid Western scrutiny (Nor & Leung, 2021). Once in power, Al Bashir's regime launched a so-called "civilizing project" to reshape Sudanese society (Mahe, 2006). This campaign entailed a stricter application of Sharia, public executions, corporal punishment, the systematic repression of women's rights, and the creation of Islamist militias tasked with eliminating political opponents. The imposition of these policies was not just about religious governance but also about reinforcing Arab cultural hegemony – especially in regions where Arab identity was contested.

Under Al Bashir, Sudan became a hub of Islamist radicalism, hosting figures such as Osama Bin Laden and organizing conferences that promoted anti-Western ideologies. This ideological shift further alienated marginalized regions such as Darfur and the South, where Arab identity had long been imposed as a marker of social and political legitimacy. In December 2003, Al Bashir declared: "Our top priority will be the annihilation of the rebellion and any outlaw who carries arms." What followed was a state-sanctioned campaign of extraordinary brutality. Arab militias, armed by the regime, carried out systematic attacks on Darfurian villages, often returning to the same locations multiple times to ensure their destruction. Amnesty International documented the use of chemical weapons against civilians in the Jebel Marra region, where survivors exhibited symptoms consistent with toxic exposure, including severe respiratory distress, loss of vision, and fatal skin blistering.

While ethnic conflicts in Sudan were not new, Al Bashir's deliberate weaponization of Arab identity to justify ethnic cleansing represented an escalation of state-sponsored violence. The Arabization-Islamization framework provided both ideological justification and political cover for the atrocities committed in Darfur—an issue that requires further examination.

Arabization and its Impact on Darfur: An Analysis

The impact of Arabization on Darfur is multifaceted, involving political, social, and economic dimensions that have shaped the region's marginalization and fueled intergroup violence. The Sudanese government has often framed the conflict in Darfur as a struggle over dwindling natural resources between sedentary African farmers and nomadic Arab herders. However, a closer examination reveals that the roots of the conflict extend beyond resource competition to deeper racial and political structures that have reinforced Arab supremacy at the expense of Darfur's African communities.

Racial Categorization and Ethnic Hierarchies

One of the most profound impacts of Arabization on Darfur is the imposition of racial hierarchies that define power and access to resources. As discussed under the theories of Social Categorization, the Sudanese government has politically elevated their Arab racial identity, while African groups have been systematically marginalized.

This racialization was particularly evident during the Darfur genocide, which began in 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched a rebellion

against Khartoum's rule, citing decades of political and economic neglect. In response, the Sudanese government armed and mobilized Arab militias—the Janjaweed—to wage a brutal counterinsurgency against Darfur's African population. The underlying motivation was not simply resource control but a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing. Hagan and Raymond-Richmond (2008) documented evidence of racial dehumanization, with survivors recalling Janjaweed fighters referring to African villagers as "slaves" and claiming they were "cleaning" the area of non-Arabs. This ideology of Arab supremacy remains central to understanding the atrocities committed in Darfur.

The Center-Periphery Divide and Political Marginalization

Another impact of Arabization is geographical categorization and marginalization. Arabization reinforced Sudan's historical center-periphery divide, entrenching Darfur's political and economic exclusion further. Olsson and Siba (2003) argue that the conflict in Darfur has two key dimensions: (1) the cultural and economic tensions between Sudan's Arab-dominated center and its African periphery, and (2) local disputes over land use. Darfur, which remained an autonomous sultanate until 1916, was largely ignored under British colonial rule. When Sudan became independent, successive governments, dominated by the Arab elite in Khartoum, continued this neglect. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium's policies had already established the economic and political primacy of the North, leaving regions like Darfur and the South without adequate infrastructure, representation, or development (Abdelhay et al., 2011).

Under Omar Al Bashir's rule, Arabization became an explicit state policy, worsening Darfur's marginalization. In 1990, his government decreed Arabic as the sole language of instruction in universities and introduced compulsory Islamic studies courses (Bredlid, 2011). Schools that did not conform were shut down, further erasing African linguistic and cultural identities. This politicization of language reinforced the dominance of Arab identity as a prerequisite for social mobility, making it nearly impossible for Darfur's African communities to access political or economic opportunities.

Land Dispossession and Social Stratification

Another significant impact of Arabization in Darfur is the restructuring of land ownership along racial lines. Historically, land in Darfur was managed through a communal system, where local African tribes controlled allocation. This system created a distinction between "dar owners" (indigenous African tribes) and "non-dar owners" (Arab nomadic groups). However, as Arabization policies gained traction, land distribution increasingly favored Arabs, shifting power away from indigenous communities.

This tension escalated when the Sudanese government encouraged Arab settlement in Darfur, giving land to Arab-identifying groups at the expense of African populations. The Janjaweed militias systematically targeted African villages, burning homes, destroying crops, and displacing entire communities. By 2005, millions of Darfurians had been forced into refugee camps, their ancestral lands occupied by government-backed Arab militias. This shift not only exacerbated local ethnic divisions but also created an entrenched system of land-based social stratification, fueling continued violence.

Arabization and Religious Justifications for Violence

While Arab identity in Sudan is closely tied to Islam, religious differences alone do not explain the violence in Darfur. Many African Darfurians are Sunni Muslims, yet they were still targeted during the

genocide. This suggests that Arabization functioned as both a racial and political project, using Islam as a tool of control rather than a unifying force.

Madibbo (2012) highlights the dichotomy between Arabism (associated with Islam and Arabic culture) and Africanism (linked to indigenous beliefs and Christianity). This binary, reinforced by decades of state propaganda, helped justify the subjugation of African communities. Al Bashir's government sought to spread Islam through coercive means, using the state's legislative system to enforce religious conformity. However, this enforcement was selective—non-Arab Muslims were still excluded from power, demonstrating that the true goal was not Islamic unity but Arab supremacy.

Myhill (2010) further argues that the rise of militant Islamism in Sudan reflects a broader shift in Arab nationalism, where religious extremism is used to mobilize populations against perceived threats. Yet, as the Darfur conflict shows, Arab-identifying elites have often targeted non-Arab Muslims with greater violence than they have directed toward Western powers. The Sudanese government's attempt to frame the genocide as an Islamic conflict is contradicted by the reality that all of its victims were Sunni Muslims.

The impact of Arabization on Darfur extends far beyond Arab cultural assimilation. It has reinforced racial hierarchies, entrenched political and economic marginalization, dispossessed indigenous communities of their land, and justified mass violence under the guise of religious and ethnic superiority. While the Sudanese government has framed the Darfur conflict as struggle for resource, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Arabization and the deliberate racialization of identity played a central role in shaping the policies. The failure of Arab unification on a larger scale mirrors Sudan's internal fragmentation, where Arab identity became an exclusionary tool wielded by elites to consolidate power.

CONCLUSION

Sudan's Arabization and Islamization policies have systematically reinforced racial hierarchies, institutionalized Arab supremacy, and marginalized African communities, particularly in Darfur. Successive governments have promoted Arabic as the national language and Islam as the state religion, not only as cultural policies but as tools of political and social exclusion. Under President Omar Al-Bashir, these policies reached their most extreme form, manifesting in the ethnic cleansing of Darfur's African populations. Arab identity was weaponized to justify mass violence, while religious ideology was strategically employed to consolidate power and silence opposition.

The Darfur conflict is not simply a struggle over resource or an ethnic dispute; it is the product of a deeply entrenched system that has long privileged Arab identity at the expense of non-Arab groups. Arabization, rather than fostering unity, has widened Sudan's internal fractures, fueling cycles of violence and exclusion. Despite various peace agreements, the structural inequalities that led to the conflict remain largely unaddressed. Darfur continues to suffer from displacement, economic underdevelopment, and political exclusion, perpetuating a state of instability.

For Sudan to break free from this cycle, fundamental reforms are necessary. These must include policies that promote inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and the recognition of Sudan's diverse ethnic and cultural identities. Granting Darfur a degree of autonomy, similar to South Sudan's secession, may offer a path toward sustainable peace. Additionally, international actors must play a

more decisive role, not only in facilitating dialogue but in ensuring accountability for past atrocities. Without meaningful change, the legacy of Arabization will continue to define Sudan's political and social landscape, obstructing any genuine efforts toward national reconciliation and justice.

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