

**Strategic Terrain: London, Urban Politics and the Darfur Crisis**

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## Introduction

September 2003. The phone rang. We were sitting in a café in Notting Hill, London and it seemed an unlikely place to be speaking to the rebel leader of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA). Yet satellite phones change everything. High in the hills of the Jebel Marra volcanic mountain range in Darfur he had called Abdul - a member of the Fur tribe - to ask for help with a number of logistical issues. Before I knew it, the phone was thrust into my hand. "Thank you Miss Anne for your support of the people of Darfur" he said with a clarity that belied the distance involved. Even though I had walked the streets of London with refugees from the Fur tribe for a number of months by this time, I was astonished at the effectiveness of global communications technology; at the way it could circumvent structures of authority, skip from a mountain range in Sudan into the West of London. "*Afwan*"<sup>1</sup> I replied. "How are the people there?" I already knew of this man by reputation; a lawyer who had taken up armed struggle to protect members of his tribe from being killed. In common with a lot of his colleagues, he had left his home and spent years away from his wife and family trying to defeat militia forces known as the *Janjawiid*<sup>2</sup> and their backers, the Government of Sudan. And yet it seemed surreal; somehow extraordinary that I could be talking to him from this café in the West of London.

Over the course of two years that I spent doing the research for this book, these kinds of interactions were repeated frequently. Spending time on the streets of West London; helping out in small human rights offices; sleeping out on the pavements of the capital to protest against the genocide of people of Darfur, it became clear that London is a space of mediation and innovation for new political practices. As a communications circuit, as a space where rights can be fought for, as a bulwark against authoritarian regimes, London is a crucial space in which political alterity can flourish. In the networks, informal spaces and homes of this city I was transported into another world where it soon became obvious that city space is strategic terrain for those who can utilize the dialectic between formal and informal practice for their own political goals. Inside this world, I learnt how refugees and immigrants build their own forms of political meaning and act to redefine themselves as political subjects capable of making change. I also learnt what it means to be politically legible in contemporary urban space: how London and other cities of the West are the stage for political practices that they have yet to be made aware of.

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<sup>1</sup> You're welcome

<sup>2</sup> The word *Janjawiid* has been variously translated as "men on horseback" or "devils on horseback". It is said to be an amalgam of the word *jinn* (devil or malevolent spirit), *jim* (the word "G", many argue that this refers to the G3 rifle) and *jawad* (horse)

The question of how immigrant groups become political; how the politics of developing world countries are brought to life on the streets of Western cities is more salient than ever before. As cities play host to increasing numbers of foreign nationals; as multiple forms of political action exist cheek by jowl; as major international crises are mediated through these spaces, the process through which people become political really matters. Since the outcomes can be emancipatory and inclusive on one hand, or reactionary and exclusive on the other, it is now vitally important to understand the drivers behind such processes since they are as important to those *involved* in politics as those *who aren't*. And these processes are far from transparent. Starting the fieldwork in January 2003, I had no idea of the world that I was about to enter. For sure I had done a lot of background research, I had trained extensively as an ethnographer in the University of Chicago; I was no stranger to movement across borders since I had moved myself from the U.K to Chicago in the first place. But this was not the same, not even close to understanding what it means to be caught up in the whirlwind of political action that *is* an international conflict of this kind. It wasn't close to knowing what it means to be involved in forced migration; what it means reconstitute networks elsewhere and what it means to be politically effective in a system that is different and in many ways incompatible with one's own. To understand these things you have to know what it means to live life on the margins and - which is perhaps more important here - how to use those margins to effect political change.

This book analyzes the process through which new types of political subjects emerge in contemporary urban space. Using the Darfur crisis as a lens to illuminate changes in the political landscape, it looks at the role cities play in providing both legibility and opportunity for refugee political actors. Through a model of political subject formation, it shows how new actors emerge inside existing political fields and the way these political fields are related to the host country. It takes the reader inside the complexity of the city and demonstrates the conditions of possibility required to produce new political forms. These conditions, borne of disjunctures and contradictions between old and new migration flows; between competing ideologies, between formal and informal ways of doing politics open up the political landscape and allow new modes of *doing politics* to emerge. They also demonstrate how multiple forms of agency exist in cities like London; how we need to step way from traditional understandings of social movements and ethnic politics and move instead to a model that embraces complexity as the seedbed of political innovation.

## Changing People, Changing Politics

London is a city where multiple political scales and actors operate. This is not a particularly new observation since writers such as Agnew (1994), Brenner (2004), Panitch(1994) Sassen (1996; 2005) have written extensively elsewhere on the role cities play in changing forms of statehood and governance. We know for example, that as particular functions of the national state are being unbundled and qualitatively transformed in many ways, the city - and urban policy in particular - has become a key political site through which changes in governance operate. One of the key findings of this literature is that as the reach of globalization extends, place increasingly matters. In contrast to early accounts that saw the city as a mere sub-unit of larger national changes, more recent work shows how the city anchors and provides important terrain through which economic, political and social changes can be mediated.

Yet cities like London are not just being transformed by the dynamics of the developed world. As changes in state governance in the West gradually start to appear, concomitant changes occur in the developing world. For a myriad of reasons related to capitalism, ethnic violence, resource competition and unequal opportunities, the development and diversification of some states is accompanied by the collapse of others. As these states fall into crisis, chaos and political uncertainty drives refugees into the West bringing new ways of being and thinking about how to do politics. And while new constellations of regulatory mechanisms, rights and claim-making emerge in the West through the rescaling of state functions; while transnational financial workers impose their own designs on the city, a parallel move is occurring in the informal spaces of our cities (Sassen, 1998). This informal sphere is inhabited by a set of actors whose voices are not so well known or represented: a set of actors that often have uncertain legal status or rights. The recognition that they seek by coming to the West is not automatic or unchallenged, yet for all this lack of formal legitimacy they operate with similar levels of scalar sophistication as those representing the rights of capital. They move into parts of Western cities and are able to navigate the complexity of the city by linking the politics of the street with formal political structures. At the same time they are able to jump scales by leaving their own political fields in London to work with supranational bodies such as the U.N. or the International Criminal Court (ICC). They meld the politics of their origin with those of their new locations. Using telecommunications technology as a way to subvert the control of authoritarian regimes; they inhabit a new space of possibility. Yet this space is one of circumventing practice and innovation: a space created of a sort of Certeauian political practice of making do.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>de Certeau “ The Practice of Everyday Life”

Analyzing these informal political practices in London presents a unique set of problems for a researcher. For example, to know what an activist means when he says he is “working the margins” or “working in the margins” you need to be clear about where those margins *are* in relation to the political field you are analyzing and who they belong to. So in the case that I am looking at here, to understand the politics of the Darfur Crisis, you have to understand Sudanese politics and of course, the larger geopolitical picture. You also have to understand how these relationships change as they hit the ground in London and how they are connected to diaspora politics elsewhere. You have to know who is allied to whom, where the political boundaries lie and where those boundaries are asserted to manage difference. You have to be able to work in a world governed by a wholly different set of political logics; to get inside the political hermeneutic circle and understand *how* such logics generate new ways of political being. To unravel this world one therefore must be as comfortable with the informal political world as the formal political world. This means being able to move from the pavement - in for example, a demonstration or street level meeting - to the U.N. chamber or African Union negotiations in Abuja. It also means that one has to be prepared to dig beneath the surface of the obvious; of what is known, and really analyze how actors innovate in the political environment to change the rules of the game in their favor.

This book therefore engages two major strands of research that are deeply intertwined and yet require their own analytical conversation. On a more substantive level, the first pertains to the Darfur crisis itself; to the conditions that led these political actors to leave the westernmost region of Sudan and make the long journey to London in the first place. And here it is imperative to understand the drivers behind such movement because they necessarily produce certain kinds of tensions once people reach London. So I will make a brief foray into the history of Darfur and ask why “African” and “Arab” identities emerged in the first place and what this tells us about the kinds of tensions in the region. The other key question here will be “why Darfur?” What would a study of the effect of refugee flows from Darfur into London tell us about political subject formation that other studies don’t? How for example - taking account of the different location - has identity formation changed since Fredrik Barth and Gunnar Haaland wrote about Darfur in the groundbreaking book “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries” in 1969? At this point it is worth reflecting on recent differences in political refugee flows in London *vis a vis* earlier refugee flows from central or southern Sudan. It is also worth considering how new political actors from Darfur are able to insert themselves into an existing political field in different ways and how this insertion has the ability to circumvent or displace existing political forms. I reserve the chapter that follows for a conversation about “why London?” since this is a question in its own right.

The second strand of enquiry relates to theoretical issues surrounding the study of emergent political identities. Questions about why actors become political, how they became political and what even constitutes a political field are scattered across a variety of sociological, philosophical and political literatures. What I address in this book is the emergence of new types of political selves and most importantly the *process* by which this occurs. I look at the way these modes being political produce new types of political praxis and ultimately innovation in the political environment. And to understand the ways in which cities are changing one has to start where new kinds of political selves are emerging and analyze how this occurs. Isin puts it aptly when he argues that there is an ontological difference between politics and being political. He argues that “being political means the ability to constitute oneself simultaneously with and against others as an agent capable of judgement about what is just and unjust” (Isin, 2002: x). Since difference and boundary drawing between self and other lies at the heart of this process, it is here that my analysis will start. As I will go on to show, it is in this dialogic encounter, in the complexity of the city that the person capable of being political is formed which later also constitutes the person *qua* political actor.

### **The Darfur Crisis**

In 2004, the genocide in Darfur burst onto our T.V screens with horrific images of villages being raised to the ground, people indiscriminately killed and long lines of people fleeing their homes with whatever belongings they had left. As cameras panned around the crowds of displaced survivors, the human misery was evident and in the eyes of the children there was an emptiness borne of the unspeakable horror of this kind of war. Yet however appalling these images were, they still failed to capture the full extent of the suffering. Women and their daughters as young as seven or eight had been gang-raped; men castrated and left to bleed to death; people taken as slaves. Men were forced to watch their daughters being violated after which they were shot in the head. These horrors started to unfold in the dawn hours as Antinov aircraft carpet bombed villages to “soften up” target areas. *Janjawiid* militias would then sweep into the villages setting light to the traditional straw roofs of the homes to drive people out into the open. There, running and stumbling over one another in the semi-darkness, the villagers tried to find a way out of the path of the militias. Some of the younger people managed to hide in the scrub, but many of the village elders just couldn’t move fast enough. As they ran, many were shot or hacked to death; others were taken captive. Even those who managed to get away were forced to walk for days, carrying their children through baking heat and dust storms, to insecure refugee camps.<sup>4</sup> There

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<sup>4</sup> Members of the rebel movement told me of a woman they found who was making the long trek from her burned village to a camp. Having found a baby abandoned a few miles down the track, they asked her if it

instead of finding safety and comfort, they were forced to build their own shelters with little or no hope left for the future.

Darfur is not the only example of the brutality of this kind of war. In Rwanda, close to 800,000 people were killed in as little as 100 days in a frenzy of inter-ethnic group violence. The outside world, despite protestations to the contrary, did little to help. Too big a problem; too little time; too many complexities, they later admitted. The UN - and Kofi Annan in particular who was the head of UN peacekeeping forces at the time - seemed impotent to act even in the face of wholesale carnage. In 2004, on the 10 year anniversary of the massacre, I sat in the UN chamber in Geneva at the Human Rights Commission with the Darfur delegation and listened as Annan, now head of the U.N., spoke of the need for urgent action to tackle the Darfur crisis. The numbers of dead were reaching epic proportions he argued. However, in contrast to Rwanda, he didn't want the world to turn its back on *this* issue; he didn't want the genocide to continue unwinding before the eyes of the world in this slow-motion spiral of death and destruction. Yet even the days immediately following this speech it became clear that this was exactly what was happening. In Darfur – in contrast to Rwanda - the killings had gone on for years at varying levels of speed and intensity. There was little excuse for international community to claim that time wasn't on their side. Yet in spite of clear evidence; in spite of the systemic construction of the machinery of slaughter, little was done. The killings went on. At their height, they numbered more than 10,000 per month. Recent estimates place the total number of dead in the region of 200,000 – 400,000.

These staggering numbers tell us of the intensity of the crisis, but say little of its origins. Why did the crisis start? Many accounts trace the starting point to March 2003 when one of the rebel factions - the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) - attacked El-Fashir airport in Northern Darfur destroying government planes and infrastructure. This, according to some, was a deliberate play for political and economic parity with other areas of Sudan and an attempt to bomb their way to the negotiating table<sup>5</sup>. Others cite the emergence of the now infamous document called "*al kitab al aswad*" (the Black Book) as the call to action. This book – written by disillusioned Islamists from the West - mysteriously started to circulate in May 2000 in mosques and other public domains in Khartoum. It was a study of the wealth and imbalance of power in Sudan: a careful statistical

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was hers. It was. When questioned about the reasons why she left her baby there, she replied that she was so weak she didn't have the strength to carry it. If she had stayed there, they would both have died. These kinds of calculations reveal the brutal reality and the kinds of calculations that Darfurians have to make on a daily basis.

<sup>5</sup> More specifically it was argued that the Western rebels were trying to emulate the Southerners, who through the SPLA had been successful in achieving a measure of state power.

analysis of the way that the government of Sudan had consistently oppressed and marginalized the Western provinces of Darfur and Kordofan for years.<sup>6</sup>

Of course if one looks at the crisis retrospectively, these accounts constitute a coherent explanation of its genesis. History however reveals their inadequacy. As early as 1992, stories emerged of harassment of local farmers and traders; of systematic attempts to burn villages and kill local people defined - either by themselves or others - as African.<sup>7</sup> In Darfur - in common with Rwanda - the heart of the crisis lay in the construction of ethnic groupings which aimed to create a "them/us" dichotomy. It was not therefore a matter of religion - since Darfurians are predominately devout Muslims - but a conflict based on perceived ethnicities. So those from African villages were often referred to pejoratively as "*abid*" (slave) or "*zurga*" (nigger) which marked them out as disposable and subordinate to the Arab population. Embedded in these terms were also references to larger historical pattern of slave raiding and trading in the area: a doubly offensive racial slur. By using pernicious distinctions such as this it was possible to lay the groundwork for assertions that it was acceptable or even dutiful, to kill African groups in Darfur in pursuit of Arab supremacy. It also laid the groundwork for the descent into an 'alternative moral universe'; a universe that Kofi Annan so eloquently outlined in the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Rwanda speech.

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<sup>6</sup> The Black Book is reputed to have been written by 15 people - calling themselves the Seekers of Truth and Justice - during a five month period of secret meetings in Khartoum. It shows how particular groups in the center of Sudan had monopolized cabinet positions, the military and the judiciary. A number of the authors of this book subsequently formed the Justice and Equality Movement, one of the Rebel factions now operating in Darfur.

<sup>7</sup> There are numerous accounts of attacks on farmers and traders from 1997 onwards. Dili, near Shoba, in Northern Darfur was attacked in 1992, when 35 people were killed. It was burned again in 1999 by an Arab militia, akin to the Janjawid but as yet unnamed. Here is a typical narrative of a young Fur cattle farmer aged 25, now based in London, who chronicles the attack on his village in 2000: "The troubles began with the militia a long time ago. In 2000 the military and Arab militia started to attack the villages, killing people and then burning villages. They burned my village in 2000. They came about 4 o'clock in the morning with horses and there were people still sleeping. They came with a big attack and burned the houses and killed people. People just ran away. They used guns. There is so much racism about the tribes in Darfur. And if you live somewhere else they won't give you a job, because they will ask "what is your tribe?" If you are from Darfur they won't help you with anything. My family is all destroyed. My father and my brothers, they were killed before they attacked the village. One of my brothers was arrested by the Government and released. Then he was attacked and killed while traveling between two villages, I'm not sure whether by the Government or Janjawid. I just ran away after the village was attacked. I went through many villages. I was in Bardi, a small village near Zalingey, when it was attacked before dawn later on in 2000. Running from there I fell and injured my leg in the dark. I went to a village near Shoba. I was in that village when Janjawid with Government soldiers came together around August 2001. They burned the houses, destroyed everything, killed the people and stole whatever they liked. I went to another village near Shoba. This was attacked in 2002 by the Janjawid. They burned houses and shot people. My mother was among the dead. I was shot in the elbow but managed to run away. The government caught me after that together with a lot of people who had fled different villages. I was put in jail for a few days but I ran away. I escaped by hiding in a rubbish container. When the lorry came to collect it from the prison, I got away. After that I went straight to Port Sudan and came here. It was July 2002". "Lives in our hands, June 2005, The Aegis Trust

Kofi Annan was of course, right. Where genocide is concerned, the conceptual apparatus of carnage always predates the carnage itself. And in the growth and solidification of the political categories of “African” and “Arab” we see the most disturbing precursors to the crisis. While there is evidence that racist jibes have been exchanged historically, it is only recently that an African/Arab dichotomy emerged in earnest. As Alex de Waal points out, these kinds of exclusionary ideologies started to emerge with the formation of the Libyan sponsored Arab Alliance in 1987<sup>8</sup>. At this time Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya - engaging in a war with Chad - hosted Sahelian Arab Groups which ranged from the Islamist Sudanese Ansar groups to Tuareg rebels from Mali<sup>9</sup>. Arming and training such groups under the rubric of creating an Islamic Legion, he used them to spearhead the Libya’s war efforts against Chad in the hope that he could get his hands on the Aouzou strip (an area reputed to have rich uranium deposits). In addition to destabilizing Chad and unseating its government, his aim was to create an Arab belt across the entire Sahel. His partnership with Sadiq Al Mahdi (the Sudanese Prime Minister of the time) allowed him to act as a proxy for the joint Islamicization/Arabicization agenda of the Sudanese government: a relationship that has continued in various forms to the present day.

Gadaafi’s ambitious plans met with failure however. Trying to improve his chances of success in the war he made the mistake of using Darfur as a base of operations from which to launch military offensives against Chad. He therefore flooded the Darfur with weapons, further destabilized an already under-resourced and unstable regional government and promoted a pro-Arab discourse to all those that would listen.<sup>10</sup> His plans backfired. While traditionally there were permeable ethnic boundaries and fluidity in local identity formation, these provocations encouraged local African tribes such as the Fur and Massaleit to adopt a more militant African centric position. Before long, boundaries started to harden along ethnic and tribal lines leading to identities that were distinctly African or Arab in nature. Local African village defense forces started to appear to defend their kin from what appeared to be an immanent threat. By 1989, things had gone seriously awry and under pressure from all parties, a peace conference was convened by Prime Minister Sadiq al Mahdi. Gadaafi was forced to withdraw from Chad and cease meddling in the politics of the region. A UN peacekeeping mission verified total Libyan withdrawal following an International Court of Justice decision some years later.

While this was going on, two major events changed the historical trajectory of the region. In 1989 Lt n -Gen Omar al-Bashir swept to power in Sudan via military coup and immediately initiated a virulent form of militant Islam. He banned all political opposition and instigated a campaign to

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<sup>8</sup> See A de Waal (1989, 2005) *Famine that Kills*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>9</sup> Ibid xvi

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, ppxvi

remove any adversaries from power. Many adherents of conventional political parties found themselves at the receiving end of his wrath and were forced to flee the country. Reeling from these dictates which had nothing to offer the Christian and animist South, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) sponsored an incursion into Darfur in 1991 with the idea of uniting Sudan's marginalized African tribes.<sup>11</sup> Daoud Bolad was at the helm of this insurrection. Bolad, by anyone's standards was an enigma. Initially a staunch supporter of the government during his student days and born into a Mahdist Ansar sect (the origin of the Islamist Umma Party)<sup>12</sup> he subsequently disappeared from the limelight when he left university in 1978. Over this period of time he opened up a woodworking shop in Southern Darfur and maintained a support for the Islamist cause albeit in a low profile manner. Yet in 1987 in response to the threat posed by the Arab Alliance to his tribe, he came out of hiding and turned tables to support the SPLA, the African anti-government army of the people of Southern Sudan.<sup>13</sup> In doing so he epitomized the complex identity formation issues in the area and the fact that while there were multiple forms of political and religious affiliation, the anchor of loyalty was ultimately one's tribe.

Bolad took on the challenge of inciting an insurrection among the Fur tribe, yet it was an unqualified disaster. Not only was Bolad captured and tortured to death but his supporters were also routed. Those who had supported the government in thwarting the uprising, such as the Beni Halba militia (*fursan*), were rewarded with control and retitling of local land in their favor. The government thought that it had dismissed African political claims to the area, yet these thoughts were premature and in this failure lay the unmistakable signs of changes to come. The conflict was *not* over; it was only starting to warm up. The shifting and complex nature of identities in the region were starting to develop a life of their own which would come back to with a good deal more ferocity to haunt the people of Darfur later.

Over the years that followed, quiet simmering resentment among the African tribes of the area erupted occasionally over land distribution and incursions by Arab nomads who brought their animals to graze too early on land that African farmers were still using for cultivation. The concept

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, ppxvi

<sup>12</sup> The Umma Party was established in 1945 as the political wing of the Islamist Ansar movement. This movement hailed back to the 1880's in Darfur and followed the strict teachings of the Mahdi – a religious leader. Most of them were found in the rural areas of Darfur and Kordofan. Darfur has always been a strong support base for the Umma party until comparatively recently when, in the face of the mounting crisis, local Muslims began to associate the Umma party with the Islamist establishment and with those that sold them out to Arab supremacists.

<sup>13</sup> See Deng, F. (1995). *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*: pp460 et seq; Harir, S, Racism in Islamic Disguise? Retreating Nationalism and upsurging Ethnicity in Dar Fur, Sudan, Unpublished paper, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bergen pp12-13; DeWaal, Alex (2005), "Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement". Justice Africa, London, pp

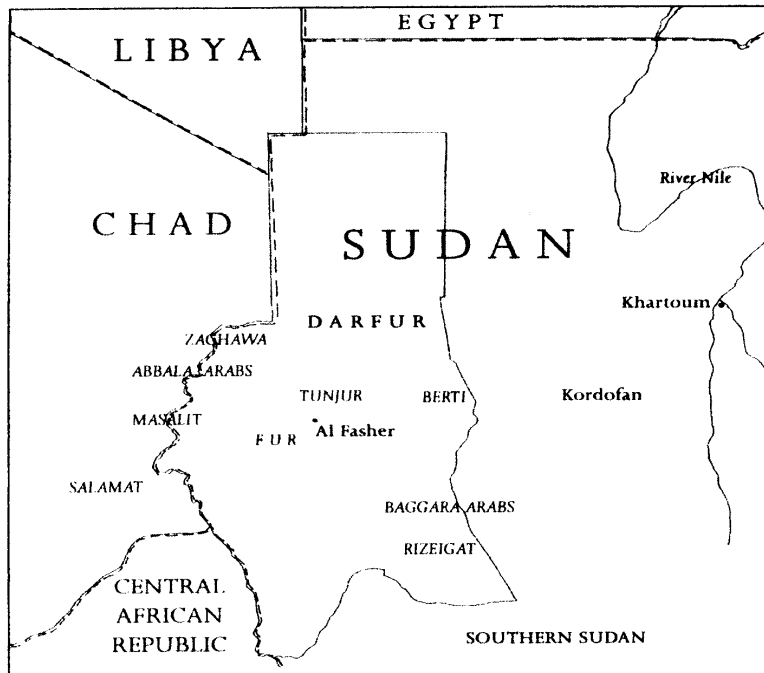
of tribal homeland or *hakura* system continued to be a thorn in the side for many of the Northern Rizeigat nomadic tribes who felt that they had been short-changed over land as a result of their nomadic status. Even the redrawing of administrative boundaries in 1994-95 into three states and the establishment of *amarat* or principalities did little to ease tensions since the basis for awarding these tracks of lands was along ethnic lines. Resource starved by central government, the local government of the region was impotent to intervene to end these disputes. Further, the choice of Gadaafi & co to use Darfur as an arms cache meant that guns were plentiful and were often the chosen method for some to resolve land disputes. These kinds of disputes heightened ethnic tensions especially since marauding northern Reizegat militias were able to terrorize local populations with apparent impunity. A vicious circle of ethnic violence started to escalate and by end of 1990's the stage was set for the *Janjawiid* to emerge. By this point the motives behind the raids were thinly veiled justifications relating to land, but even the most cursory inspection revealed that greed, banditry and criminality were key components of the behavior of these groups.

Of course in a country with a stronger state, citizens should be able to rely on their government to intervene to stop this kind of opportunism. However, the people of Darfur had no such safety net to fall back on. By the late 1990's cracks were starting to appear to the National Islamic Front consensus as a result of disagreement between Lt-Gen Omar al-Bashir, the President and the leader of the National Assembly Hassan al-Turabi. Turabi started to pose a threat to Bashir over the introduction of *tawali* or political associations that gave limited rights of political expression. Fearing that Turabi was about to manipulate the National Congress Party to restrict Bashir's authority in December 1999, Bashir dissolved the National Assembly and placed Turabi under house arrest<sup>14</sup>. He also introduced a State of Emergency to quell potential unrest in the country. Besides creating tremendous reverberations in the Islamist machinery of government, Turabi's political demise split the Islamist base of support. Many younger people followed Turabi out of the Islamist mainstream and went into opposition. Prominent Islamists from Darfur - supporters of Turabi and later members of the Justice and Equality movement (JEM)<sup>15</sup> - did likewise. In seclusion they set to work against the government detailing the efforts that had been made to exclude the west of the country. Over time the net result was the publication of the Black Book (*al kitab al aswad*), a publication that would cause untold damage to the government at a later date.

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<sup>14</sup> M A Mohamed Salih, (cite)

<sup>15</sup> The JEM are a well financed rebel group with reputed links to Turabi. They claim that Darfur has been marginalized by successive government in Sudan but ultimately have different designs on the region than their larger rebel counterpart the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)



Tribal Map of Darfur.

Source: FlintJ & Alex De Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War*

Irritated by their opposition and the fracturing of the Islamist base, Khartoum suspended any form of support for Darfur and instead pursued an all-out policy of counter insurgency through “*aktul al 'Abid bil 'abid*” (kill the slave by the slave). The aim behind this move was to provide a cheap war against the problematic Western provinces and to remove all sources of dissent. Like the policy that was pursued many times before - particularly in the South where people from Darfur and the Nuba mountains were sent to fight their African brothers - Bashir thought that he could use and manipulate “Arab” groups such as the Beni Halba and Northern Reizegat to do his “dirty work” for him. This time however a justification of Islamicization could not be used since the people of Darfur - and particularly the JEM - had better Muslim credentials than the government itself (c.f. de Waal, 1989: xviii). So the rationale used became one of Sudanization or Arabization; an attempt to spread Arab based, social, cultural economic and political values: a rationale that dovetailed nicely with the tensions that had already set in play in the region. Now called the *Janjawid* by locals, these proxy agents it therefore set out to remove “African” groups from their *dars* (homeland) through a violent and sustained program of genocide. Clever to a fault, the government used these local proxies to get on with the work of genocide while utilizing Western discourses of weak or failing states to proclaim their inability to exercise influence in the area

The killing fields that emerged as a result of these policies will go down in history. Today, what is happening in Darfur is mainstream news and the word *Janjawiid* has catapulted itself into the vocabulary of millions worldwide. On the rolling grassy plains of the region lies the wreckage of people's lives; of hope for the future and of the cohesion of Dafurian society. Thousands of people remain in insecure refugee camps; kids grow up seeing their families dependant on foreign aid; children born of rape act as a painful reminder of what it means to be African. Deep tensions run through the society like never before. In Abuja, rebel factions stand in bitter opposition to one another in a conflict that now seems all but intractable. Gadaafi, as a master puppeteer, is never far from the face of trouble and is once again meddling in the region, pitting one group against another at the direct invitation of the Sudanese government<sup>16</sup> What should have been a process of reconciliation is mired in debates about land, the continuing desertification in the area, questions over putative mineral deposits, the resultant geopolitical games and the deeply contradictory goals of the international community. All of these facts militate against an easy solution for the region. And so the chances for peace today look increasingly shaky, which stand in direct opposition to African or Arab identities which are, by contrast, starting to look increasingly firm.

### **Why Darfur?**

As if any more complexity would ever be needed, London adds a new environment and a different set of political realities to negotiate. Chapter two will address these in more depth; in particular what it is about London that acts as a political draw. But before I get there, any discussion of the politics of the Darfur crisis should be prefigured by the "Why Darfur?" question I posed at the start of the chapter. What do refugees from Darfur add to our understanding of the emergence of new kinds of politics in western cities? Why has the arrival of political refugees from Darfur laid bare the dynamics of political identity formation in London?

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<sup>16</sup> Being closely watched by the international community, the Government of Sudan relies on Libya to keep the conflict and instability going in the area. And there are a number of key interests at stake for them here. The first of course, is the long harbored dream of the Arab belt across the Sahel. This guiding vision and trajectory has underpinned the Arab Alliance despite what at times appear to be contradictory actions over the years. The second is creating instability in the Chad and Darfur region since chaos furthers these interests and may heighten the possibility of being able to make strategic land grabs. Third by destabilizing the rebel groups and buying off factions such as the Zaghawas, it can thwart efforts of the international community to bring the crisis to an end. Fourth, since the Zaghawa base in Darfur was used to launch attacks against the government in Chad before, Gadaffi is hoping that by consolidating this base; by permitting the migration of Zaghawas from Chad into Sudan it may again provide opportunities to destabilize the existing power base in Chad

In part, the explanation relates to the differing perceptions of agency between existing and incoming political actors. These perceptions – which can be accounted for by the regression of the political system in Sudan - revolve around tensions between standard political party affiliations that originally characterized the political landscape of the country and the increasing salience of other ways of political *being* such as tribal and informal politics. This creates a dialectic between standard forms of political expression such as political meetings and the politics of the street or the virtual sphere. As I will show later, it is in the juxtaposition of these forms that the real seeds of political innovation can be found. It is in the informal salons of opposition ministers; in the interchange on the street; in demonstrations against human rights abuses that conversations happen that have the potential to change existing ways of political praxis. These new ways of doing create frictions between existing political forms and produce challenges and new types of action that play out on the ground.

One of the key issues that contributes to the over layering of political tensions is the constant flux of political refugees through the political field in London, since many of these refugees come from diametrically opposed ends of the political spectrum. Besides those who came to the capital as a result of educational exchanges between the University of London and the University of Khartoum (then Gordon College)<sup>17</sup>, the first major flows of refugees started to arrive in 1976-1978 from the Center and South of Sudan. Each group had their own rationale for leaving their homeland; each a different set of concerns. In the South, increasing concern over the tenuous alliance developing between Nimeiri and the Islamists, the discovery of oil in the Bentiu area and a growing sense of cultural and political identity led to political unrest and the first serious inflows of refugees to London. In the North political dissidents out of favor with the increasingly ideologically erratic President Nimeiri and his authoritarian regime also found their position untenable. Arriving in London in the wake of the Lebanon war were also a number of Middle Eastern newspapers many of whom had Sudanese staff. Taken together this patchwork of different groups set the groundwork for the Sudanese political opposition yet the population was always characterized by movement to and from Sudan dependant on prevailing political conditions.

This movement between London and Sudan was heightened in 1989 when Lt Gen. Omar Bashir launched a military coup and seized power. At that point, since all political parties, trades unions and other organizations were banned, significant inflows of political refugees started to arrive in London from across the political party spectrum. A lot - although not all of these refugees - were from the center of Sudan, hailing from established political parties such as the Communists, the *Umma* (nation) party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Others came from trade union and civil society groupings. Many were highly educated as one might expect with a military

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<sup>17</sup> This was prior to the Arabization of the curriculum of Khartoum University in the late 1980s.

clampdown of this kind, drawing from the intelligentsia, artist community, doctors, politicians, journalists and so on. Probably with the exception of those from the SPLA, the kind of political field that was established at this therefore was heavily reliant on standard forms of party and institutionally based politics. These forms – while not premised on the separation of church and State – also had more in common with the kinds of politics that characterize the party systems of the West<sup>18</sup>.

However in recent years following new refugee flows, the situation has started to change. Sustained attacks against the peoples of the Nuba mountains in the early 90's led to inflows of refugees and the establishment of specific activist groups. The Darfur crisis also produced similar effects. And with these new groups, some interesting developments have started to emerge. The first relates to the salience of political parties. While initially some of the refugees from Darfur identified themselves in terms of political or ideological groupings, more - particularly the younger people – now eschew these kinds of politics altogether. Many follow either the political aspirations of the late Dr. John Garang de Mabior of the SPLA/M and the New Sudan movement, have given up on politics altogether or follow rebel movements in Darfur such as the Sudanese Liberation movement (SLA) or Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). The Umma Party which previously viewed Darfur as a stronghold has lost significant ground since locals feel that the party has sold them out to a larger Arabicization agenda. The Communists – a more intellectual party based loosely around Marxist principles – never really had a strong base of support in a religiously devout region such as Darfur, so their position hasn't eroded quite so markedly. The other party to have a significant following in the region is the Sudan Democratic Federal Alliance. This party is not based on ideology or religious affiliations, rather it is concerned with promoting a new mode of governance in Sudan and more equitable distributions of power along regional lines.

The second development relates to the weakening of Sudanese state competency and increasing recourse to tribal politics. This adds to the complexity of the political factions since tribal ties now overlay pre-existing axes of conflict around religion and political ideology. As the former governor of Darfur explained, there is a direct relationship between the weakness of the state and the prevalence of tribal politics:

“...In Africa, in our country, tribalism is still strong. The government really, the government has not become so effective, so tribalism still plays a role of security for its members, of welfare for its members ... The vastness of the country, the government cannot provide security and everything that people need at the grassroots level. So the tribe plays a role within the community and this is reflected in politics”

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<sup>18</sup> Clearly I don't mean to imply here that a party such as the Umma party - which is based on a religious lineage - is the same as those operating in the West. However, the prevalence of the party *form* does have strikingly similar characteristics to the West.

In London this produces new tensions. Amongst the Darfur refugees there is support for the rebel movements and – to a lesser degree - for existing party affiliations. But tribal loyalty is never far from the surface. In periods of turbulence, at times when there is disagreement between tribes in Darfur, tribal affiliations form the basis for political decision making in London. As a result, there is an immediate or constant tension between the needs of a larger movement for Darfur and the needs of any particular tribe. This produces multiple overlapping axes of conflict that pull political activists in competing directions and have important effects on the way that the political field develops and changes.

The question is not so much why tribes are still salient – since the crisis in Darfur and attacks made by the government should make this self evident – but why these new refugees dwell in that zone of political indeterminacy and utilize it for political ends. In part it is a story of the incursion of *marginal politics* into the political field of Sudan; a story of divergent paths to development and modernization where the center of Sudan adopted a more standard post-colonial model in which tribes were less important and the peripheries - where tribal affiliations were less easy to suppress – adopted other ways to deal with political relations. In some ways there are echoes of Mahmoud Mamdani's argument about a "regime of differentiation" which, entrenched in post-colonial countries, leads to urban citizens and rural subjects. Yet this pessimistic vision understates the agency of peripheral subjects; it understates their ability to escape the conditions that produce their subjection; it reproduces standard modernization trajectories and fails to address the potential that that such tensions filled notions of the self have for political innovation.

One way to think about the ways that new political subjects bring political innovation into cities like London is to use previous accounts of identity formation as a standard from which to assess change. The classic in this regard was Barth's 1969 essay, "*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*", which produced a model for identity and boundary maintenance between groups as well as a more grounded analysis of how this worked in Darfur. Barth argued that ethnic groups are defined by the act of drawing boundaries between themselves and others. It was not therefore a matter of what the boundaries enclose that was relevant, rather the act of demarcating or drawing difference (Barth 1969: 15). And, as he went on to argue, such groups are not maintained by a "once-and-for-all recruitment" but instead by continual expression and validation. Gunnar Haaland in the same volume then used these ideas to analyze the relations between Arab Baggara (nomadic groups) in Darfur and the Fur (sedentary farmers). Far from a distinct and rather concretized boundary, he found that there was ethnic boundary penetration between the two

groups. Put simply, he found that sedentary African farmers would take on the group identity of Arab Baggara herdsmen according to need and circumstance.<sup>19</sup> This confirmed fluidity in identity formation processes and intimated an ability to pragmatically adapt to lifestyle changes under certain circumstances.

Clearly, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since 1969. Notably, as the earlier section points out, ethnic boundaries have started to harden into the master categories of “Arab” and “African” with a little help from geopolitical conditions and incumbent dictators. But one of the interesting questions is how these boundaries remain and do the work of political identity formation once refugees reach London. Is there still any element of this permeability left or do the rigid “Arab” and “African” master categories act as the ultimate guide to political being and action? Who is on the street in London and who contributes to the political landscape? What kinds of refugee communities exist and how do their relationships to each other provide the openings for political innovation? What in short does Darfur offer to our understanding of the way that new types of politics are becoming legible on our streets?

Haaland’s identification of the pragmatic adaptations to circumstance between the Fur and Baggara in 1969, now manifest themselves in a more creative approach to politics borne of the necessity to navigate complex political ties. Used to dwelling in that uncertain zone between needs of one’s tribe on the one hand and the needs of the movement or party on the other, new refugees adapt much more readily to the complexity of the political field in London. So while many of the main parties carry on business as normal, some of the activists from Darfur utilize a zone of indeterminacy in the political field for their own particular objectives. They are happy to work – as they put it – in the margins, since those margins can be more productive political territory. They are quite willing to work in different political forms – informal, formal or across the lines of British politics - since they recognize that this complexity also produces possibility.

What effect does this have on the political landscape of the city? Certainly the conflicts of identity borne of this crisis provide an outstanding opportunity to see how refugees navigate the political field, produce their own forms of political being and morph into different kinds of political actors according to prevailing circumstances. It gives us a way to look at how schizophrenic identities –

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<sup>19</sup> At the heart of such identity changes was the ownership of animals. If a farmer had a small number of cows he would contract a Baggara nomad to herd them to pasture for him and each group would retain a distinctive identity. However once those cows reached a critical number (100 or so) he would trade his life as a sedentary hoe cultivator to become a nomad himself. This meant that Fur farmers would often follow traditional Baggara nomads and set up camp nearby. Over time - and as respect was established - there was a significant likelihood that groups would intermarry leading to an out-migration of African farmers into a more nomadic lifestyle. Haaland argued that this demonstrated that ethnic boundaries were not fixed and that identity was

tensions over selves represented by tribes, movements and parties and conflicting ideologies – produce a more flexible political subject. The speed of the differentiation of the political field in London also makes these changes more legible than other more slowly evolving political fields.

On a more general level, the tensions visible over the Darfur crisis in the Sudanese political field in London speak to dynamics that are occurring in other immigrant communities in the capital. Tensions between old and new immigration flows, between mainstream and fundamentalist visions, between parties and street politics are rifts that run through many communities. What the Darfur crisis offers is an opportunity to map the process by which old political forms fracture and new ones emerge (if in doubt think about some of the tensions in the Pakistani community in the U.K over political Islam). It also gives a much clearer sense of the role Western cities play in this process.

### **Mapping complexity**

But how does one map this inordinately complicated political landscape? How does one explain the emergence of new types of political being in a field that is saturated with different kinds of political relations? How for example does one even start to talk about these new kinds of politics in light of the potential literatures such as the “social movements” literature or the literature on “identity politics?” If political action on Darfur occurs even in the face of what appears to internal inconsistency; even by using indeterminacy; even in the ebb and flow of agreement and disagreement, then how do existing literatures speak to this problematic?

Traditional social movement literature does little to help in this regard<sup>20</sup>. For sure we can look at how macro events act as a frame for a movement; we can also look at micro-mobilization contexts as a way to translate opportunities into a context where they can be used for the purposes of mobilization. But what is missing is a true sense of process. Even if you are able to represent the structure of a movement, even if you are able to represent that movement over time in snapshots, this still seems to produce a fairly static picture of ways that new kinds of political actors work. Since my goal is to account for how new types of political actors use difference to operate in the interstices of opposition and challenge existing centers of power; since these actors operate on a fast moving political terrain in which pragmatic concerns can often determine who works with whom and for what length of time, one of the key issues here has to be flexibility and movement. There has to be an ability to move quickly without carrying a movement structure (conceptual or otherwise) around on your back.

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<sup>20</sup> Insert note re: Snow MMZ et al.

The idea of trying to link the micro and the macro aspects of the movement in a structural way therefore produces a rather unhelpful dualistic logic. Since the actors that I discuss in this book are just as familiar with the use of Internet or satellite phone as a way to mobilize as they are with a conventional meeting; since they are as able to operate from a location on their own as with a crowd around them; since all interaction takes place in a local context even that which has macro overtones to it, the idea of linking structures “out there” with sentiments or actions “in here” seems a little unhelpful.

So what are the possibilities? Recent work does go some way to alleviating these complaints, particularly work that looks at networks and flows as a way to visualize political potentialities. Work such as that of Deleuze and Guattari (1986), Lash and Urry (1994) and Castells (1989, 1996, 1997), is somewhat helpful in this regard. Castells’ notion of “resistant networks” as a way to counteract the placeless logic of the space of flows invites us to juxtapose movement on one hand and resistance or re-embedding on the other.<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of rhizome takes us towards notions of “multiplicity”, “assemblage”, “fluidity”, “de-territorializing” and “re-territorializing” and invites us to problematize notions of “beginning” and “end”. Yet helpful as these concepts are in dealing with complexity, their necessary imprecision - which after all helps them to make the point – makes the job of explaining the process by which new political subjects emerge all the more difficult.

So it would seem logical to turn to some of the identity formation literature, particularly that which looks at identity politics. But here again there are substantial problems. Identity politics encompass a whole range of issues from the personal to the collective from the private to the public (Calhoun, 1994). And many of the accounts - at least when the term was at its most fashionable - privileged far too essentialist a notion of identity. As Judith Butler points out, typical accounts often presume a pre-given departure point of the subject without really considering the construction or regulation of the subject itself (Butler, 1992). And to privilege a political category of “woman” or “ethnic group” one has de facto to gloss over internal differentiation; one has to move away from complexity in the hope that unity will anchor a certain kind of political project.

These shortcomings haven’t escaped the critical eye of identity scholars. In *Beyond Identity* Brubaker and Cooper argue that the term “identity” has lost its salience due to the hopelessly contradictory explanatory burdens it has been forced to carry. There are, they argue, strong and

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<sup>21</sup> Cite Mimi Sheller here

weak understandings of identity<sup>22</sup>, some of which have so much flexibility that they render the concept analytically useless. In such complex terrain the challenge is to produce an account that neither indulges in the *bête noir* of essentialism nor engages in the clichéd constructivism that writers such as Brubaker and Cooper have so vehemently criticized.

But what are possibilities for taking this middle road? While concepts such as “identity”, “identity politics” and “social movements” continue to be embattled on many levels, recent debates have at least illuminated the usefulness of *process* in an understanding of how selves emerge. Now, rather than using reified categories we are encouraged to look for activity; to look at the way that people come into being *vis a vis* others and to understand the fundamentally relational nature of this process. Further, this interchange has also reinforced the need to work within a more situated or contextual framework, since it is in a location that the conditions of possibility and limitation of actors’ worlds become all too painfully clear. And for the complex world of Sudanese diaspora politics this has a number of distinct advantages. On the ground, at the point where actors encounter each other it is far easier to detect the building blocks of new kinds of political praxis; to map the way that multiple overlapping relationships produce tensions and struggles over existing political categories. From here it is also easier to trace out the threads of difference that create new forms and to ascertain *how* and *why* they connect to other contexts.

But pragmatically, where do we start here? What kind of theoretical material might help in this regard? Looking at the most popular schools of thought there are still a lot of holes. For Post-Structuralists - Foucault being the most obvious example - subject formation comes about at the intersection of two related things: discourse and power. Particularly in his earlier work, he refused to give priority to *individual creative* subjects, as such. In this work, he was therefore much more interested in showing how certain kinds of subjects were produced as effects of discursive and power relations. While he never went as far as to suggest that the subject can be dispensed with (as we see in radically structuralist approaches)<sup>23</sup> he did argue that subjection came about through particular discourses, which constrain – but also enable - writing, thinking and acting in specific ways. Foucault’s approach to subject formation or “constitution” - to use his phraseology - arose out of a concern not to give primacy to subjectivity *per se*. Instead, Foucault saw the human subject as an effect of subjection: at the “particular, historically located, disciplinary

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<sup>22</sup> Brubaker and Cooper have argued that the replacement for strong and perhaps more essentialist notions of identity have been replaced by clichéd constructivism. They define this as: “Weak or soft conceptions of identity [that] are routinely packaged with standard qualifiers indicating that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated and so on”. These qualifiers, they argue, “have become so familiar – indeed obligatory – in recent years that one reads (and writes) them virtually automatically. They risk becoming mere placeholders, signaling a stance rather than words conveying meaning”. See Brubaker, R & F Cooper (2002) *Beyond Identity* in *Ethnicity without Groups*.

<sup>23</sup> Althusser, 1976, for example.

processes and concepts that enable us to consider ourselves as individual subjects” (Grace:1993:3).

This approach has been particularly influential and still continues to pervade academic writing on subject formation today. (See, for example, Isin 2002). Yet it still seems rather unclear how discursive systems produce subjects when those subjects are mobile and the matrix of discipline seems less than complete. How for example would this work when movement and indeterminacy make it impossible for discursive systems to operate in the way Foucault outlines? How can we account for contemporary processual changes in identity when the only tools available are disjunctive readings of history?

Work in phenomenology, interactionism and hermeneutics seems a little more helpful in this regard since it allows us to understand identities in the making; it also relies on language, meaning and interpretation as integral parts of the calculus. For example, using *phenomenology* and the issue of intentionality Heidegger considers how subjects come into being through the encounter with everyday life. He doesn't deny that we can experience ourselves as conscious subjects with intentional states, yet he sees this as a form of dialectic; an intermittent movement from a predominately unconscious grasp of the average-everyday categories of social life into an occasional consciousness. This move, predicated on what amounts to a disturbance in the average-everyday world of the person, can bring about a form of intentionality where the person actually has to stop, think and direct her attentions to the problem at hand. Language is a key component of this process since it is through language - language as a temporal entity, as a form of living memory- that we understand the nature of what we are. It is this observation that has provided the stepping-off point for much contemporary theory about the self and subject formation, particularly that which utilizes narrative.

But can these theoretical observations help with a processual account of identity? In the kind of complex field that I dealing with there has to be a way to understand identity formation that does not rely on imputing certain characteristics and thoughts to groups; that allows some of the advances of the phenomenology and hermeneutics to shine through. There also means to account for the way that the self encounters the world not just through face-to-face interaction – as we understand it from Mead – but also through those un-embodied forms such as the Internet, satellite phone, media and so on. There has to be a methodology by which we can map changing identities as they occur across boundaries on the ground.

Here the work of Andreas Glaser is useful. His work on “identifications” argues that identity is produced through the constant interpretation of self and other.<sup>24</sup> These identifications are produced at the point of confrontation, where connections are made with the other party to the interaction. Meaning is thus produced by contextualization, by making connections to the other in a particular kind of way. As Glaeser points out, the meaning of self (i.e. identity) is produced “by identifying (i.e. connecting) self with itself at other points in time; with other persons; with beliefs ideas and values; with the world in the widest sense” (Ibid Pp 9). Through this essentially hermeneutic approach he aims to show how identity formation comes about through everyday interaction; how minute identifications constitute the building blocks through which this process is accomplished.

What Glaeser is advocating here is both theory and methodology. It is a way to understand identity formation processes by observation of how people identify each other across boundaries. It is a way to analyze complexity without recourse to reified categories. In what follows I will therefore put the theory and methodological implications that follow from this to work in the service of trying to understand how political subjects are emerging in London. I will consider how these new kinds of subjects are emerging not just in response to the pre-existing boundaries drawn by the parties; not just by the boundaries drawn between movements and parties; not just between tribes. I will show how these identifications act on the terrain of London to produce disjunctures and contradictions that breathe new life into the political field. I will argue that identifications are not just made in face-to-face interactions but also in those moments that you encounter other in all forms. I will show how the distant can be made near via technology; how identifications made in virtual or non-proximate forms can act on the field in London producing antagonism and new ways of being.

### **Plan of work**

These opening remarks provide some key ideas that will be elaborated throughout the book. In the chapter that follows I look at London as a space of politics, how it works as a node in the network of Sudanese politics and why it matters to those who have chosen to make it their base.

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<sup>24</sup> Identification is not a new term. Originally a psychodynamic perspective emanating from Freud, it has since been adapted to various situations and usages. Take, for example, the use of “identification” in a literal sense to examine the way that States use documentation to attach markers to individuals for their own purposes (Noiriel 1991, 1993, 1998; Fraenke 1992; Torpey 2000; Caplan and Torpey, 2001. Hall 1996 and Somers 1994 have used the term in a more general sense to underline way that public discourse can promote certain understandings about individuals or groups. Becker has also used the term. The advantage, of “identification” rather than “identity” is its processual connotations; the way it brings activity into identity formation (Brubaker, 2004). Glaeser’s work is particularly useful in this regard because it provides a theory & methodology through which we can map the way that identifications play out when they hit the ground.

In considering these questions I look at the history of the city and some of the key trends in London towards diversity and multiculturalism. I also look at some of the hype and negative identifications made of refugees and public opinion as they are articulated in the popular press. Since it is important to understand the meaning that refugees give to London as a political space, I subsequently also interview political actors from Sudan and Darfur and ask them what London means to them: why it is such an important space for their politics.

Chapter Three uses some of the ideas about complexity in the city to generate a model of subject formation. Here I use the concept of boundaries and assemblages to analyze how movement and re-embedding create new kinds of political forms and ways of doing politics. I show that while transnational flows are important, it is through *encounter* – encounter on the street or in virtual space - that selves are constituted. I also show that by mapping these boundaries and tracing connections from context to context we are able to see how constancy and change are produced in different political landscapes. I argue that this kind of approach tells us a lot about how political innovation occurs in Western cities and how events external to the actors concerned are processed to produce new kinds of political selves.

Chapter Four moves this theme further by looking at the changing structure of the political field in London. Here I map out the key actors, how they move within the city and how city space is used in particular kinds of ways for political gain. I show in more detail some of the tensions between existing political parties, new movements and individual actors and how they negotiate life in diaspora to manipulate what is happening at home.

Chapter Five analyzes the poetics of the street; the political choreography of diaspora life and how people use meetings on the street and elsewhere to further their agenda. I look at the maneuvering that goes on around demonstrations, at the marking of political authenticity on the street and at the ways that political organizations seek and try to assert their authority through resource acquisition and display.

Chapter Six follows with a look at the other side of the political coin: the formal sphere. Here I look at the world of British politics, the international circuit of human rights activism and how some the actors in London fit into this equation. I look at the uneasy relationship between refugee politics and the host countries in which they embed; I show that there is still a long way to go before countries in then West appreciate their role in both the formal and informal dimensions of refugee political life.

I conclude by asking what it means to “be political” in western cities today. Since it seems highly unlikely that cities will become more homogenous in the years to come; since it is clear that demographics of major cities are changing what does this imply for the politics of inclusion? Much ink has been spilled in the question of economic globalization, on changing systems of law and regulation, even a lot on political globalization as defined by the increasing prevalence of supranational organizations. But what does it all add up when it simply serves to illuminate growing polarization, increasing frustration and unequal access to resources? I therefore ask what the implications are for our governments and city managers. Using ethnography and interviews with Sudanese immigrants, I show that there is much to learn from immigrants in terms of the revitalization of our own political sphere. I also argue that these differences must be engaged if the city is to remain strategic terrain for dialogue, rather than an increasing zone of contestation.