# Dynamics of Identity Construction among the Ethnic Communities in Darfur: A Conflict-based Perspective

*Dinámica de la construcción de la identidad entre las comunidades étnicas de Darfur: Una perspectiva basada en el conflicto*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates dynamics adopted by nine ethnolinguistic communities affected by the current conflict in South Darfur State to construct their ethnic identities. Qualitative data were obtained via focus group discussions, interviews, posters from the landscape, and observation over a period spanning from 2012 to 2013. The findings show that, firstly, there were unprecedented micro-interethnic identity construction dynamics across the study area. Secondly, within these interethnic identities, there were also emerging intra-ethnic identities – all spurred by the wholesale community ethnicisation processes. Thirdly, revitalization of ethnolinguistic identity was found to be the major tool employed by the communities under study, with varying degrees, to establish their distinct identities. Fourthly, ethnolinguistic identities constructed varied from one group to another, ranging from 'strong' to 'moderate' and 'weak', depending on the community's ethnolinguistic vitality. The paper concluded that the major factor in the emergence of these micro inter- or intra-ethnic identities was the current conflict in Darfur.

**Keywords**: Identity construction; ethnic community; conflict; Darfur; Sudan

## RESUMEN

Este trabajo investiga las dinámicas adoptadas por nueve comunidades etnolingüísticas afectadas por el actual conflicto en el estado de Darfur del Sur para construir sus identidades étnicas. Los datos cualitativos se obtuvieron a través de discusiones de grupos focales, entrevistas, carteles del paisaje y observación durante un período que abarca de 2012 a 2013. Los resultados muestran que, en primer lugar, hubo una dinámica de construcción de identidades microinterétnicas sin precedentes en toda la zona de estudio. En segundo lugar, dentro de estas identidades interétnicas, también había identidades intraétnicas emergentes, todo ello espoleado por los procesos de etnización de la comunidad al por mayor. En tercer lugar, se descubrió que la revitalización de la identidad etnolingüística era la principal herramienta empleada por las comunidades estudiadas, con distintos grados, para establecer sus identidades diferenciadas. En cuarto lugar, las identidades etnolingüísticas construidas variaban de un grupo a otro, oscilando entre "fuerte", "moderada" y "débil", dependiendo de la vitalidad etnolingüística de la comunidad. El documento concluye que el factor principal en la aparición de estas micro identidades inter o intraétnicas fue el conflicto actual en Darfur.

**Palabras clave:** Construcción de la identidad; comunidad étnica; conflicto; Darfur; Sudán

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## 1. Introduction

Linguistic variation in Sudan is inherently indexical of historically constituted subjectivities in contexts of social struggles. In this paper we are interested in inspecting the social indexicalities embedded in the (meta)linguistic practice in some contexts in the conflict-ridden region of Darfur. The sources of materials for this paper are focused group discussions, relatively structured interviews and the semiotic landscape of the university of Nyala. Our primary aim is to explore the ideological ways in which the enduring historical struggles shaped the self-conception of individuals and their situated valuation of sociolinguistic complexity. Our argument here is that issues of ethnolinguistic vitality in Darfur should be understood from a conflict perspective as a form of resistance to the institutionalized Arabic 'monoglot ideology' (Silverstein 1996). We use the term 'language ideologies' to refer to cultural conceptions about sociolinguistic varieties articulated by historically positioned speakers (Gal and Irvine 1995). These socially shared ideas map linguistic distinctions or differences onto people, places and events. Gal and Irvine identified three semiotic processes through which relations between linguistic varieties and persons are constructed, conceived, and institutionally regimented as 'typical': iconicity, recursiveness and erasure.

We use this conception of language ideologies a long with the semiotic processes to explore how a group of youngsters from the Darfurian region in Sudan conceive of the sociolinguistic complexity. In this situation of both armed and ideological struggle, our aim is to understand how the metapragmatic discourses (commentaries about language usage) are systematically anchored with social categories and events. In other words, we are interested in the way the wider categories of social stratification emerge in interaction, and through which semiotic mechanisms and processes. We conceptualize ideologies of language as practice-mediated cultural conceptions about the nature of linguistic varieties and their speakers. That is, language ideologies mediate linguistic practice, identities, and wider macro-level structures of political and economic power. We understand 'identity' in processual or relational terms as a positionality in the lived world of power, thus its social nature depends on the differential access to resources (and thus to voice) including genres, ideologies, and spaces of knowledge associated with social positions. In situations of conflict such as Darfur, social identities and linguistic resources are by definition stratified; however, it is our aim to explore the structural basis of this stratification and how it is indexically cued in the linguistic practice or comments of the participants.

In this paper we view 'language' as a form of locally organized practice. Exploring the situated conceptualization of language-in-practice allows us to engage with the ideologically mediated ways in which actual individuals use, comment on, reflect upon and refer to sociolinguistic variation. Since we are focusing on historically constituted subjectivities in a context of conflict and struggle in Darfur, the salience of structural categories of identification and social values of linguistic resources cannot be analytically determined a-priori. They emerge in the process of struggle and social interaction including relatively structured interviews with researchers.

In the next section we will situate the data in its local and wider historical contexts. Although this historical contextualization plots European (British) colonialism as a significant formative moment in the formative trajectory of the nation-state, the question of whether the country is still living under conditions of coloniality is, we contend, an issue to be taken as a problem rather than a given. In other words, it provides an archeology for language ideologies. Another caveat is that the historicization of the material in the wider relations of genocidal wars in Darfur launched by president Basher's Islamist regime should not allow for any easy structural determinist readings, i.e., all the peripheralized in Darfur are automatically anti-Arabism or anti-Islamism or that they would support democratic change. In other words, there is no any necessary correlation between specific broader political and economic structures, languages and historical bodies. To avoid this essentialist trap, we focus on the data-analytic section (section 3) on actual linguistic practice as a dialectically mediated nexus between (trans)local identities and larger contextual structures. We explore the collected materials with the goal to inspect how historical processes of struggles in Darfur are played out or realized in local ethnolinguistic identities and articulated values of linguistic variation. Section 4 draws on the historical contextualization and analysis of material to provide a more focused discussion on the archeology of the embedded or explicitly flagged language ideologies.

## 2. Materials and Method

In the dominant sociolinguistic order in Darfur, bodies and practices are generally regimented with specific historically constituted ethnic associations. We are interested in investigating how social individuals and groups in Darfur perceive and construct their ethnolinguistic identities in the ideologically charged context of (armed) struggle and conflict. In other words, we want to engage with the question of how the enduring processes of struggles in Darfur against all forms of oppression (both physical and normative) have mutually shaped linguistic practices and the nature of the indexical associations they invoke (tribal, political, gendered, etc.). To achieve this goal, we have drawn on varied data sources including ethnographic observation, photographic documentation of the linguistic landscape in the university of Nyala, relatively structured interviews, a questionnaire, and focused group discussions.

To contextualize contexts of the data in its broader historical contexts, the region of Darfur is located in the western part of Sudan. Darfur was an independent Sultunate for quite a long time before it was annexed to the Sudan in 1916 by the Anglo-Egyotian colonisers. The region is divided into five federal sates: East Darfur, West Darfur, North Darfur, and Central Darfur. Here we need to summarize the history of Darfur very briefly and the colonial history of Sudan with a focus on policies of Arabicisation and Islamization as cultural political instruments of national identity construction in the postcolonial Sudan, and how this form of cultural politics

is antithetical to social and linguistic diversity., communities and individuals in South Dafur are socially stratified into ethnolinguistic communities. There are more than twelve ethnic groups in South Darfur, but only nine were selected for the present study. They are Fur, Massalit, Zaghawa, Daju, Hausa, Fulani, Jeblel, Borno, and Borgo. Some of these tribes live in Nyala Town, and others have resorted to big IDPs camps in the immediate vicinity of Nyala town. Locally, these camps are known better as *sangarat*, or squatting slums. We have organized two focused group discussions: the first one with individuals representing the selected nine ethnolinguistic communities, except the Hausa who live only in the towns, and the other with students from the University of Nyala. The total number of individuals engaged in FGDs and individual interviews is 132. Some of these data were collected in 2012 and further recent data from the linguistic landscape were collected to detect any patterns of change.

For the FGDs and interviews, we used '*why-/how-*' questions format determined by our research objective. We used observation and photographic documentation to collect materials from the linguistic landscapes of the University and other areas in the town. Due to the socio-political sensitivity of the issues discussed to the majority of the IDPs in the meetings, no tape-recording was generally allowed (except by few participants).

More data were also collected from many active ethnic groups such as the Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit, Fulani and Daju students' associations. Of particular significance was the 'language-scape' displayed by several student associations everywhere in the University during the data collection process. It offered us very significant data which we could not have obtained by any other tool. As a caveat, although theoretically we operate with the principle of social construction, we had to strategically essentialize by starting from the existing ethnolinguistic distinctions; however, these given categories will be interrogated, confirmed or problematized during the process of analysis and discussion.

The recent political history of Darfur was marked in 1981 when Ahmed Ibrahim Direig of a Fur origin was selected the governor of the Greater Darfur. Active groups in the then political arena such as the Arabs, Zaghawa, and Berti who had been anticipating winning the office of Darfur Governor were the most apparent active interactants (Salih 1998). Consequently, a feverish ethnic jockey for gaining a privileged political status prevailed among the competing ethnicities. One group, however, so squarely made its manifesto public, i.e., the Arab group. On September 9, 1987, a group – naming itself the Arab Congregation – submitted an appealing petition to the ex-prime minister Al-Sadig Al-Mahdi. The letter was a perfect epitome of an ethnically-driven demand for power and wealth-sharing. It concludes: "...accordingly, we are afraid that, if this negligence of the Arab element persists, the situation will slip away from the hands of wise men to the hardliners and dire consequences might follow." Reminiscent of the Arab Congregation manifesto

are the Zaghawa's and Fur's too. Although there are no written documents substantiating the undercurrent ethnic tendencies of the latter two groups, both of them are widely believed to be planning to found their own congregations and overseeing a comeback. Whatever the aspirations of these groups are, such a propensity might apparently show how the tribal political figures strive to maintain ethnic-asserted statuses

However, in terms of both political and ethnic propagation, the first ethnic congregation of its kind was held by the Berti, known by Berti Conference in 1995 in Malit, the capital of the Berti homeland. Consequently, the conference was taken by many ethnic groups as a yardstick by which their loyalty to the government could be tested when they go parading at official celebrations. The whole panorama could be described as, in Wright's (1997b) words, propagation mechanisms established by politically powerful centres to whip communities into the maintenance of loyal groups.

## 3. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

To ground the analysis in the data, let us start with some excerpts from the collected materials:

1.      In an FGD, a university Zaghawa discussant argued:

"Does that mean I won't be a Muslim proper if I were not an Arabic-speaker? Or that my culture is primitive if I do not carry an Arab culture." (Translated from Darfur Arabic dialect).

2.      In the same vein, another Zaghawa discussant contended:

"It was the folly of the Darfurians to allow for themselves to be fooled and mesmerised by the rhetoric that they carry an Arab culture because they speak Arabic. Islam is for all the Muslims, not for the Darfurians in particular".

3.      A Zaghawa discussant argued that:

"All the Darfur dialects [languages] are now persecuted. Our languages should receive a status equal to that of the Arabic. Is it for their fluency in Arabic that the *Jallāba* are subjugating us?

4.      A Zaghawa discussant argued that:

"All the Darfur dialects are now persecuted. Our languages should receive a status equal to that of the Arabic. Is it for their fluency in Arabic that the *Jallāba* are subjugating us?"

5.      A Fur discussant noted:

"If somebody doesn't want to travel by, he will definitely look for another means of transportation. The same is true for Arabic language and the Arabs. We must use to our language to safe our culture".

6.      A Daju discussant argued that:

"To be strong amidst the conflict, one should be strong through his language first. We have to revitalise the Daju language. Many place names such as Nyrtete and Kabom are Daju names and all are a part and parcel of our history and identity".

7.      A Borgo discussant noted:

"We are all Sudanese and we only used to know each other by the names of our ancestor".

8.      A Borgo participant reacted to our research objective by arguing:

"It is this type of tribalism that killing us today. Why on earth do you want to discuss this this heinous issue with the laymen?"

As can be noted from the excepts above, the Zaghawa were the most loyal and keenest to have their ethnic identity held distinct via language. The majority of Zaghawa IDP discussants were the most outspoken discrete identity performers among the communities. In the discussions, they frankly admitted that they were rarely sensitive to others when they used their native language in public. To the contrary, and more often than not, they took pride in letting others knew that speaking Zaghawa is just like speaking in Arabic. When we argued that Zaghawa is giving way to Arabic, a fact that will render the Zaghawa people bearer of an Arab identity sooner or later, one discussant retorted: "Why do others think that speaking in language other than Arabic is an unacceptable behaviour?"

Among the Zaghawa discussants, and to some extent the Fur as we shall see below, they rather detached religion from its sanctimonious and often immutable connection it signifies in the dominant Arabic language ideology. For example, a university Zaghawa discussant expostulated because Arabic would have to 'make' native language speakers Arab Muslims (excerpt 1 & 2)

The Fur discussants were the second group most resentful of the allegedly reduced role given to their language at official levels. They also expressed their concern in making Arabic the 'sole source' of moulding cultural traits in Sudan (e.g., excerpt 5 & 6).

In wider contexts, the Zaghawa and Fur were the groups most strictly observed settling in ethnic-based clusters in Nyala and in the IDPs camps alike. Unlike other ethnic groups who were found scattered vastly in different places in Nyala, entire quarters were settled by the Zaghawa and to some extent the Fur, a status that consolidated their social solidarity and ethnic identity. This makes it easy for them to maintain and strengthen their distinct ethnic and linguistic identities.

In terms of seeing language as a part of a group's identity, the Zaghawa discussants were not only most sensitive to identify themselves with their native language, but also resentful to their language not having an equal status to Arabic (excerpt 3).

It looks that such a grievance did come from failure to, on the State's part, accommodate or officially support minority languages, thus spurring the occurrence of linguistic sentimentalities, *lingostalgia*. For example, Rahman (2002) found out that repression of indigenous languages in Pakistan did not force their speakers to abandon them. Rather, they looked at the operated linguistic hegemonies as neo-colonialism and, consequently, they used force to resist.

The Daju IDP discussants also highly perceived that their language played an important role in "reconstructing" their ethnic identity (excerpt 7).

On the ground, Daju revitalisation activities were being made in several ways. The Um Kardoos Festival, in which many activities were performed in Daju, was an unmistakable annual event held in Bilail, a big market place only a stone's throw from Nyala town. We discerned that it was the elevated status given to Daju that made its speakers took pride in it, although the fact is that Daju was not vigorously spoken by the second and third Daju generations in the study area. One of the interviewees argued that Darfur ethnic communities as a whole were creating their own mechanisms in such ethnic terms and at such an apparent magnitude. This statement is not far away from truth. The present Darfur is, regardless of the issue of ethnolinguistic identity revitalization processes, marooned to ethnic fragmentation amidst the current conflict.

The Daju university students were the keenest in revitalising their language. A Daju discussant argued that:

> Through Um Kardoos Carnival and other similar ones, we are working to keep abreast of other tribes speaking their languages…. We are fed up with being humiliated by others that we deserted our language. The best way to do… [that] is by holding such cultural activities…. Even the international NGOs won't employ you unless you have a good command of NL.

Due to its peculiar significance to 'identity shows' portrayed by students at the University of Nyala through language-scape, we will now review it, the most appealing ethnolinguistic identity construction mechanism adopted by Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit and Daju university students.

The linguistic landscape of Nyala University shows increasing number of posts announcing ethnic related events. The announcements call for maintaining the ehnic identity of the students. The fur students for instance, used the symbolic value of Marra Mountains to invite the Fur young tribesmen and woman to unite for the good of the Fur Tribe (See figure 1). The text posted was originally written in Fur with translation into Arabic. By so doing, the writer would like to foreground Fur language as a key to maintaining Fur ethnic and cultural identity. The text also reemphasizes the role of Marra Mountain as a signal of the Fur glorious Sultanates and strong Sultans, which is explicitly shown by mentioning the Shaw Dorshid, one of the Fur great leaders. We discern that naming their session after Sultan Shaw Dorshid makes evident an emerging, tantalising political comeback among the Fur students.

Figure (1): Announcement posted by Marra Mountain Students Society welcoming new students at Nyala University



**(A) Posted in January 2012**
Translations:
Line :Sultan Show Dorshid term (2011-2012)."
Line 4: Translated from Fur into Arabic "Marra Mountains is green from within but very dark black from distance. Oh, Fur sons! let's be one hand unite."



**(B) Posted in January 2013 by students from Kass**
- No transliterations.
- No ethnic-based signifiers.



**(C) Posted in January 2013 by students from Kutum**
- No transliterations.
- No ethnic-based signifiers.



**(D) Posted in January 2013 by students from Korma**
- No transliterations.
- No ethnic-based signifiers.

The board announcement posted by the Fur students in January 2013, unlike the one posted in 2012, greatly differed with either added or reduced wordings; and most significantly the former was found nowhere in January 2013. Instead, three different boards appeared – all signifying different Fur Students Associations named after geographical regions: Kass, Kutum and Korma (see Fig. 1/B, C, & D, respectively). This time, the Fur resorted to geographical regions to assert their ethnic identity rather than to the generic Fur ethnicity itself. This indicates, we argue, that the Fur were up to constructing intra-ethnic identities based on each group's homeland.

However, Fur aspirations and sentimentalities to their political dominion remained steady throughout, directly associated with the empowerment of their language. One of the Fur students we interview reported that they should elevate their identity and culture through language, which exposes them to the challenge of reflecting two different identities, Arabs and Africans. This concern led the Fur Society in Khartoum to open an institute to teach Fur language to young Fur in the capital city of Sudan. When contended how the State can accommodate all the indigenous languages, and where that institute was, the discussant was not ready to give answers to these questions.

During the discussions, the overwhelming majority of the participants used exclusivist pronouns such as *we, they, our, ourselves*, etc. This was another telling finding across almost all the communities. Ethnic demarcations imposed by such pronouns were mostly observed among the Fur, Jebel, Zaghawa, Daju and Masalit IDPs. Hardly did the present researchers notice the discussants employing inclusivist pronouns such as *our* or *ourselves* to refer to the other communities. The use of *we* pronouns to identity others was also found by Williams (2009) in Britain among the Welsh-speakers who used first and third pronouns to designate the English-speakers for historically antipathies.

The Zaghawa students' board announcement in Figure (1) shows a very telling Language-scape. Both announcements shared a transliterated expression (*afoor kābi*), meaning "Welcome!" However, a new line is added in the one posted in 2013. Among the students whose ethnicities were characterised by ethnolinguistic vitality, (i.e., the Daju, Fur and Daju), naming their associations after their past kings or sultans in 2012 was a common phenomenon. Having discovered that their board announcement was devoid of such a historical and political asset, the Zaghawa students, in 2013, added a new line (line 3 in Fig. 2/B) to elevate, as argued by one discussant, their ethnic status to or to keep in conformity with the other groups in this interplay. To do this, they recalled the late head of Zaghawa Shura Council – Abdulshafi Gardia who died in late 2012. In terms of politics, Gardia would stand an equivocal chance of a charismatic leader. He would also meet Zaghawa students' aspiration to find a political leader who would fill in a symbolic gap Zaghawa students must have remained eager for a whole year to find. This is very recent political asset to the Zaghawa students.

Figure (2): Two announcements by Zaghawa students welcoming freshmen at Nyla University



(A) **Posted in January, 2012**
Translations:
Line 4: "A happy academic year."
Line 5: transliterated from Zaghawa to Arabic, meaning: "welcome!"

(B) **Posted in January, 2013**
Translation:
Line 3: Term of deceased *Abdulshafi Gardia*
Line 5: Transliteration from Zaghawa to Arabic and English meaning "Welcome!", with a minor spelling inconsistency in the Arabic transliteration.

As for the Daju students' language-scape, further indicative findings were reached. Figure (3/A) shows that the Daju were also not detached from their past. Sultan Kassifuroge was their source of power and symbol, making them resilient and up to regain their bygone days. However, what is new in 2013's Daju language-scape was the transliterated phrase (line 3). In 2012, it was missing. In Figure (3/B), the added line goes "Trumpets are ours; the Hill [Um Kardoos] is ours, you are welcome." The message sent in 2013 was as the same as that sent in 2012, but in the former through the Daju language. Both messages glorified the Hill (Um Kardoos) and the 'beating of trumpet' – a time-honoured ritual known by the ancient and contemporary ruling systems emphasizing supremacy of sceptre. In this context the 'Hill' does not signify a geographical niche, nor does Daju's homeland, but for the fertility of Daju Land and people, vitality of language, and above all, the past Daju superiority and sublimity of sultanate.

Figure (3): An announcement by Daju students welcoming freshmen



**Posted in January, 2012**
Translation:
Line 2: "The term of Sultan Kassifuroge (2011-2012)."

**Posted in January, 2013**
Translation:
Line 3: Trumpets are ours; the Hill [Um Kardoos] is ours, you are welcome.

In 2012's board announcement, the Daju students were not asserting that their language as still taking its lead among other widely spoken languages in Darfur. In 2013, however, they must have realized that one more line must be added in their announcement: to reassert that their language was still vigour, not at the verge of extinction. This suggests that in 2012 it was the Daju political identity that was asserted, but in 2013 both linguistic and political identities were expressed. As such, the Daju and Zaghawa were at odds; the former took pride in their political presence and were also managing to construct a linguistic identity, but the latter took pride in an observable and strong linguistic identity and were seeking a newly grown political status in present Darfur.

The Masalit were found to be more accommodative of the national identity than the former groups, i.e., the Zaghawa, Fur, Jebel and Daju. The majority of the discussants and interviewees argued that the national identity should transcend the local ethnic structures, local cultures and identities. Unlike the groups discussed above, the Masalit also tended to accommodate and take in pride Arabic because it signified, they contended, the national identity. However, they also tended to elevate their linguistic identity because, one argued, "Without strengthening an ethnolinguistic identity, there will be no strong national identity."

Recalling of historical symbolisms to reveal ethnic identity representations in the university was again replicated by the Masalit students. Figure (4/A) shows that Dirjail (Masalit) Students' Association named its session after the Masalit ex-sultan Taj-Eldin who had died during a battle aginst the French invaders. It is apparent that ethnolinguistic communities in Darfur were stampeding towards revitalising historical roles each tribe had played in Darfur, particularly the Fur, Masalit and Daju. What was missing in the Masalit board announcement was the transliteration, implying that there was a correlation between their tendencies to take more pride in Arabic than in their native language in public domains.

Figure (4): Board announcement welcoming freshmen (posted by the Masalit students)



**(A) Posted in January 2012 by students from Dirjail**
**Translation**:
Line 3: "The term of martyr Taj-Eldin (2011-2012)."
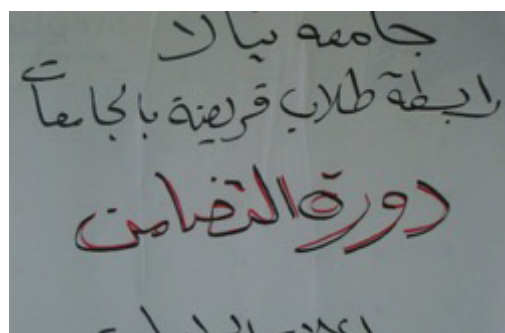
**(B) Posted in January 2013 by students from Giraida**
- No transliteration
- No ethnic-based signifier

As it was the case with Fur in 2013, the Masalit students were also found to be disintegrated in 2013, with geographical regions becoming source of their identifications. Here, the Masalit and Fur came under one category: influenced by ethnic fragmentation taking place everywhere and they reflected on that at the university. Two board announcements posted by the Masalit students were counted – the first appeared in 2012 named after Dirjail area, but the second indicating belongingness to Giraida (Fig. 4/B), a tiny town inhabited by a number of ethnic groups, located to the due south of Nyala town. Again, the Masalit were also replicating the same pattern of intra-ethnic disintegration exemplified by the Fur students.

In fact, emergence of new 'breakaway' Student Associations was not only noticed among the ethnolinguistic communities, but also among other ethnic groups at wide. According the University Cultural Affairs statistics there were about 35 student associations in 2012, almost all of them formed on ethnic-exclusive bases. In 2013, the number notched as high as 44 associations. It is evident that several splinter groups appeared and formed their own associations.

The Borno in this study included only those groups which were forced to leave their villages and seek refuge in IDPs camps in Nyala. The Borno discussants and interviewees were also noticed as actively engaged in constructing their ethnolinguistic identity. "I always send my children to the village so that they can become fluent in the Borno language," one interviewee said. Our own observation in the camps as well as in the town, however, suggests that the Borno language was not used as such in public domains. Such a finding places a discrepancy between the allegedly wide use of and taking pride in Borno in all domains of communication on the one side, and the limited use of Borno as we observed from every day domains on the other side.

As a minority in group , the Borno were found to be more accommodative to Arabic in their tendencies compared to the Masalit whose homelands and linguistic repertoires before the displacement were close to the Borno's. In addition, no Borno board announcement was noticed at the university, neither in 2012 nor in 2013. Combined with their low ethnolinguistic vitality (Garri, 2012), absence of language-scape at the university further strengthens the point that among the Borno, it was ethnic identity, not linguistic identity, that best described identification dynamics they employed across the study area. However, their clustering in the IDPs as well as the strong identity maintenance tendencies they portrayed entails that they were also very keen to have others acknowledge their ethnolinguistic distinctness.

The Fulani group strongly connected Arabic to Islam emphasizing its role in constructing their cultures and identities. The two groups differed in their perceptions of the role Fula and Jebel languages in the process of constructing ethnic identity according to the place of residence.

While the Fulani university students were keen on not to disassociate, or not to denote language as a factor in identity construction, their kinsmen in the IDPs did not only look at their language as an integral component their ethnic affiliations, but also, they employed their cultural and folkloric displays to keep their identity distinct. "Whenever someone comes to learn something about us, we must teach him something about our language," an elderly Fulani discussant joked. To show that, he did not keep on telling us what the names of animals, plants and places in Fulani were, but also urged us to write them down so that we could learn the meanings later on. However, the thinly held attitude towards Arabic as was the case with the Zaghawa and Fur was found to be the opposite among the Fulani. They strongly connected Arabic and Islam as two immutable factors in the process of identity construction.

The point that the Fulani university students were not found to be strong ethnic identity makers was confirmed by their board announcement posted in 2013. Fig (5) indicates the name Tulus, a geographical niche traditionally known as the Fulani homeland in South Darfur State.

Figure (5): Board announcement welcoming freshmen (posted by Fulani students)



Posted in January 2013 by Fulani students from Tulus
Translation (line 3): Term of the Glorious Dawn (2013-2014)
No transliterations

No ethnic-based signifier

In terms of physical distinctions and language use in public domains, the Fulani IDPs were found to be the most easily identifiable communities in the study area. They were rarely sensitive towards others while speaking in their language in public places, making them one of the communities characterized by the highest ethnolinguistic vitality groups, but the least observed in ethnic identity construction.

By and large, mechanisms of ethnolinguistic identity construction among the university students in this group were also most apparent through annual carnivals held coinciding with the production of language-scape. Such carnivals were carried out by almost all the students, no matter their degree of ethnolinguistic vitality or ethnic background. Aside the carnivals held

by Arab or non-indigenous language speaker students, clear messages were sent through these carnivals. These were explicitly expressed by appealing collective processions at the heart of the university. Their prominence was intensified by a climax: a closing procession led for a send-off or welcome party accompanied by sonorous trumpet beating, clattering with percussions, display of traditional dresses, folkloric dances and songs – all signifying identities peculiar to students' association. During these processions, the public every group invited its kinsmen from across Nyala town and beyond, sometimes from as far as from Bilail or Kass. On each such a day, the University of Nyala *goes an ethnic institution*, with participants thronging and treading up and down every road and niche at the university.

The Borgo and Hausa appeared to be less active in constructing their own ethnic affiliations. We managed to recruit only few Borgo IDPs, but couldn't recruit any Hausa, neither from IDPs camps, Nyala town nor from among university students for the focus groups discussions. Many rendezvous were unfulfilled on the part of this group, making observation the only source at our hand for collecting data.

For the Borgo discussants, the term 'identity' was by itself looked an unpalatable concept. When permutations such as identity construction, ethnicity in conflict, and identity-language relationships were placed together for discussion, they were far from admitting anything other than "we are proud of our language." However, we discerned that such a shortcoming did not mainly arise from lack of sufficient input for the discussion or arising from the participants' ignorance. Rather, it was from lack of the discussants' consciousness over whether or not they would really need to establish identity peculiar to Borgo amidst the conflict.

Apart from those who were displaced to Al-Salam IDPs camp and were thinly settled across the entire camp, the Borgo in Nyala town were not settled as such in large groups. For them, they would not find any use of constructing ethnic identities and felt a little bit frustrated by the way other ethnic groups in the conflict were involved in creating identities peculiar to themselves (excerpt 8). It is interesting to note here that, upon one of our searches for recruiting discussants, a Borgo person explicitly expressed anxiety from asking for volunteers to discuss with them the subject matter of our research (excerpt 9).

The Hausa were the only community that we failed to conduct discussions or interviews. As far as our research procedures and data collection procedures were concerned, they did not only seem to be perfectly different from all the other ethnicities, but also carried very eccentric linguistic and identity behaviours. Throughout Darfur, the Hausa are well known for settling in urban areas. They have never been displaced to IDPs camps during the current turmoil. Their places of residence were, and still are, unchanged by the current demographical shifts caused by

conflict. Thus, and due to lack of first-hand data obtained via discussions or interviews, combined with the lack of apparent or observable change in their linguistic behaviours, we could not come up with clear findings about the patterns of, if any, identity construction mechanisms adopted by Hausa communities in the study area.

In a nutshell, the Borgo and Hausa shared a common phenomenon. They did not portray any language-scape at the university. Nor were there university discussants to represent both communities.

## 4. Conclusion

Firmly grounded in the data excerpts, we note that the effects of monoglot ideology of language which correlated Arabic with Islam and subordinated local languages and diversity generally. And the study shows that on the ground and day-to-day life people reject these correlations and are aware of dominant indexicalities of languages which they use and this is due to the conflict and linguistic hegemony of Arabic. And it is within this framework of resistance to the monoglot ideology, people are interested in revitalising their local languages as indices of distinct group identities.

However, the rejection of essential correlations (e.g., tribalism, see excerpt 9) should not indicate that the person or subordinate groups are suffering from false consciousness or that they are not keen on maintain their languages. It could simply mean that the person is aware of the way in which tribalism as a category of social stratification is iconized or ideologized through specific institutionalized associated between specific linguistic forms and indexical associations. It is a rejection of ethnic determinism. Thus, the questioning or interrogation by the participants of our research goals should be welcomed as through this interaction we, as researchers, learn of the ideological effects of the metalanguage we use.

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