

NAMING THE DARFUR GENOCIDE



The Sudanese Government's Gun Barrel Politics in Dafur

Eva Dadrian

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ONCE AGAIN THE military regime of Khartoum has proved that old habits die-hard. Trying once again to solve the Darfur crisis through the barrel of the gun is a clear indication that Khartoum has learned nothing from the 20-year-old war it fought against its own citizens in Southern Sudan. Despite agreeing recently that a ceasefire is necessary to stop the bloodshed in Darfur, and despite claiming this week that the 'war in Darfur' is over, the regime has stepped up its military operations in the province and by the same token has rejected the invitation to a conference on Darfur proposed by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a Swiss non-governmental peace group, to be held 14–15 February in Geneva.

While fighting the so-called 'insurgents' the Sudanese armed forces and other paramilitary units – the Popular Defence Forces – have simultaneously targeted civilians, allegedly accused of supporting the rebellion. More than 600,000 people have fled from their destroyed villages and have taken refuge in other towns in makeshift camps under trees with almost no food, water or shelter, while more than 100,000 fled to neighbouring Chad. Khartoum announced that major military operations in Darfur are over but villages are still being attacked and burned by the Janjaweed, the Khartoum-backed armed militias, and government Antonov planes continue to bomb indiscriminately villages as close as 60km from Al Fasher, the capital of Northern Darfur.

A ceasefire negotiated in neighbouring Chad (Abeche 1) seeking to end the conflict collapsed because the government has not kept its part of the deal, i.e. stop all its military operations and especially rein in the Janjaweed. In fact Osman Youssef Kibir, the governor of North Darfur, has admitted that militiamen acting in the name of the government executed civilians in his province, although he denied that the government bore any responsibility for their acts. Last week, the government overrun a number of camps held by the fighters of

the Movement for Justice and Equality (MJE), one of the fighting factions in Darfur. Then it turned its wrath against the other faction, the Sudan Liberation Army and has surrounded Jebel Marra, their stronghold, with the full might of its armed forces and its allies.

The situation in Darfur is far from being 'under control', as claimed by the Sudanese President Omar al-Beshir. The rebellion will continue as long as Khartoum refuses to acknowledge any political motivation for the unrest in the province and rejects a political solution to the crisis, blaming it instead on 'armed criminal gangs and outlaws', who it says are aided by tribes from Chad.

Much of the tension in Darfur results from the same issues that led Southern Sudan to take up arms back in 1983 – a central government that exploits local resources, imposes its cultural beliefs on the indigenous African population and consistently plays off local tribes and ethnic groups against each other for short-term gains. The Darfur Liberation Front – which later changed its name to the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) – took up arms last February because the Khartoum government had 'introduced policies of marginalisation, racial discrimination and exploitation that had disrupted the peaceful coexistence between the region's African sedentary and Arab nomad communities'. Since the rebellion erupted the province is a war zone, with tremendous suffering inflicted on the civilian population by the army and the armed militias. SLA complains that the government in Khartoum, like all its predecessors, is dominated by the northern Arab elite and has ignored their needs. They argue that Darfur too should be offered a slice of a power-sharing deal and that its natural resources developed for the benefit of the local population. Calling for a separation of state and religion, the SLA/SLM have spelled out their objective 'to create a united democratic Sudan' where the unity of the country will ultimately be based on the right to self-determination of the various peoples of Sudan. Also, they are asking for the establishment of an economy and a political system that addresses the uneven development and marginalisation that have plagued the country since independence. Yet these claims have had no effect on the government. It continues to refuse to acknowledge the political motivation for the unrest and accuses Eritrea and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of supporting and arming the rebels.

Darfur is the most underdeveloped region in the country and is prone to drought and famines, two factors which have fuelled conflict between nomadic Arab tribes, armed by the government, militias and local African villagers. Libya, who backs the Zaghawa, 'a useful long term leverage weapon against N'djamena' according to Al Fazzan, the former Libyan ambassador to Cairo who is now representing his country in Damascus, has offered to solve Darfur's 'tribal dispute' by inviting the Arab herders and pastoralists of Darfur into Libya. There, they will receive new territories, pastures and water points and even Libyan nationality. Tripoli wants at all costs to unite with

Sudan and Egypt and recently Kadhafi has proposed a draft constitution for a tripartite union to form the Golden Triangle, his 35 year-old dream. Sudan may be an oil producer at the rate of 330,000 barrels per day, but the oil bonanza only began in 1999. With the exception of the capital, there is practically neither proper health services nor education and no communications infrastructure in the country. Neglected by successive governments, the peripheral regions – Darfur, Kordofan, the Nuba Mountains and the Eastern Province – can easily claim to benefit from ‘sustained UNDERdevelopment’.

Parallel to the issues of neglect and underdevelopment, racial discrimination and exploitation have poisoned inter-tribal co-existence. Pastoralism and farming have historically been and remain the most viable economic sectors in the province. It could be argued that land has long been at the heart of many conflicts in Africa, either between the indigenous black African populations and new comers – the case of Zimbabwe – or between farmers and pastoralists like in Darfur. During British colonial rule, the conflicts over pastures and water points were solved through the local tribal administration. Good neighbourliness still prevailed in those days; the pastoralists were allowed to move into the grazing areas with their cattle, sheep and camels, only after farmers had harvested their fields. But at independence, in the rush to modernise the country and move away from ‘old traditions’, the new rulers of Sudan dismantled the local tribal administration and never replaced it. In the early 1980s, as drought and underdevelopment reduced pastures and water resources, the struggle for survival intensified for the nomadic pastoralists. During the 1986–9 premiership of Sadiq Al-Mahdi (Umma Party) the problem resurfaced when the nomadic tribes of the region, commonly known as the Baggara, moved indiscriminately into farming lands. These actions were made possible by deliberate government policy and with the tacit approval of local government officials. The Baggara were even given weapons to ‘defend’ themselves in case they were attacked by the indigenous farmers. Needless to say, often the weapons were used to take over land and water points from the indigenous farmers.

Since then, Darfur has been the scene of attacks by armed groups on indigenous farmers. The present government reacted by detaining incommunicado in various prisons around the country community leaders and alleged critics of its policies in the province. Following unrest in and around Geneina, Northern Darfur (2001) where hundreds of Massaleet were killed and dozens of villages burnt to the ground, special courts were established to deal with ‘murders, armed attacks and banditry’. These courts have handed down death sentences and cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments – cross amputation, public flogging – after unfair and rushed trials.

Armed conflict and deliberate government strategies have largely been responsible for the long history of wars and of famines in Sudan. The current

fighting, primarily along ethnic lines, is the result of that strategy. For almost 25 years, famine and a scorched earth policy have been regarded as the outcome of a political process that takes the resources of a region from the weak – the indigenous people – and transfers them to the politically strong – Khartoum northern elites.

Various armed militia groups, the Janjaweed in the case of Darfur and the Murahleen in the Nuba Mountains and in Southern Sudan, have been the vehicles for the regime policies and have been used as proxies by Khartoum. Their task is to attack and plunder the people of a given region and take their reward – the war booty – in the form of looted cattle, crops, etc. A few years ago, these groups did not have any political agenda in Darfur, but today this has changed. Their political agenda is to assist the government in ‘arabising’ the region and taking over its natural resources – oil and minerals. The army and the security forces, the specially created Popular Defence Force (PDF), support these militias whose main task is to terrorise and isolate the local populations by forcibly preventing them from working in their fields and looking after their animals. By burning crops and looting cattle, the Janjaweed militias have created and maintained artificial scarcities of food, driving the farmers from their land and pushing them towards urban centres or to the arid, desolate parts of the province. It is true that the raiding, displacement, and asset destruction did not affect all parts of Darfur simultaneously but they have created a situation of extreme instability whereby ordinary economic activities and survival strategies became impossible.

In addition, the nature of inter-tribal clashes in Darfur has been exacerbated by an inflow of arms from neighbouring countries – Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). Tribal groups, militias, dissidents, rebel groups as well as ordinary civilians have easy access to small arms. However, in this particular instance, local politicians as well as the central government have fuelled the rivalry between farming settlers and semi-nomadic communities. Neighbouring states also have interests in Darfur. The Zaghawa of Darfur helped Idriss Deby gain power in N’djamena in 1990 and with their kin tribe in Chad they form the backbone of Deby’s army and security forces. Libya has its own agenda, especially since Col Kadhafi has turned its attention to Africa and to the mineral-rich Sahel countries. In Northern Darfur, bordering Egypt and Libya, lies Jebel ‘Aweinat, one of the richest mineral regions of the entire Sahel with foreseeable deposits of uranium, while Southern Darfur is known for its oil, iron ore and copper deposits.

The government has come under serious criticism from humanitarian and human rights organisations about attacks on civilian targets and the deteriorating security situation in Darfur. There is no circumstance that justifies deliberate attacks on civilians or military operations that endanger civilian lives. These are all grave violations of human rights and the laws of war. But since

the Sudanese leaders and their friends, especially Libya, which became a member of the UN Human Rights Commission last year, halted the work of the UN rapporteur for human rights in Sudan in April 2003 during the commission annual meeting in Geneva violations of human rights have doubled in Darfur. As early as November 2002, Gerhart Baum, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Sudan, expressed concern over the slow progress achieved by the Khartoum government in redressing the human rights situation. He referred particularly to the negative role of the nomadic Arab tribes (mainly the Baggara and Misariyyah) from which the government formed Murahaleen (nomadic) militias, which were deeply implicated in abductions and the targeting of civilians. Yet this has been crippling because civilians' cattle and grain are looted, agricultural land devastated, homes burnt, mills destroyed. Thousands of Fur, Zaghawa and Massaleet are unable to go back to their villages, plant or replace their herds.

During a consultative meeting that took place in Nairobi in January between Vice-President Ali Osman Taha and Ahmed Diraiqe, the leader of the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) and former governor of Darfur (1980–83) the government accepted that a ceasefire would be agreed and implemented under the supervision of international monitors. Negotiations opened with the Darfur fighters in order to reach a political settlement to the issue. But it seems that diplomatic and political solutions have been put aside and the government will pursue its military policy.



Sudan: Calling Genocide by its Rightful Name

Eva Dadrian

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LIKE A MULTICOLOUR fireworks display illuminating the skies and sending ecstatic crowds cheering for a few moments, the Naivasha Peace Agreement has faded away. The short-lived jubilation is over and with a serious hangover, the international community is waking up to the new Sudanese reality in Darfur, asking how and why it allowed it to happen?

Neither the UN nor the US has learned anything from past mistakes – Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Less than a month ago, brushing aside the sound of machine guns coming over from Darfur, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan described the signing of the agreement as a ‘major step forward’. Now, on a mission to Sudan he described the situation in Darfur as ‘the world’s worst humanitarian crisis’.

Before going to Darfur (as a matter of fact like Evita Peron ‘I have never left it’) I would like to stop a few moments in Naivasha and see who are the real beneficiaries of the protocols signed between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army. Is it a genuine ‘key deal’ that would benefit the Southern Sudanese people?

The sad reality is that only three individuals will benefit from Naivasha. These three so-called men of peace have succeeded in cheating the international community, the United Nations and the 35 million Sudanese.

Beleaguered, embattled and an outcast for the past 15 years, President Omar el Beshir, who since staging his coup in 1989 has escalated the war in South Sudan and sent thousands of young Sudanese zealots to their death, can now claim high and loud that he is the Sudanese leader who took Sudan out of its international isolation and brought peace to the country.

One Nobel Prize to go to el Beshir! Hip, hip, hurray!!!

Fraught with dissent among his own people and justifiably tired after 21 years of fighting, Dr John Garang of the SPLA is taking control of Southern Sudan. Crowned with the blessings brought by the Naivasha deal, Dr Garang is ready to believe anyone who tells him that he is the paramount chief of the South.

Was it a mere slip of the tongue when he declared ‘We have reached the crest of the last hill in our tortuous ascent to the heights of peace’ or did he mean ‘the heights of power?’

One Nobel Prize to go to Dr Garang! Hip, hip, hurray!!!

Last but not least, comes the Texan cowboy who occupies the Oval Room in the White House. Having waved carrots and sticks, sanctions and promises of

aid to the Sudanese for almost two years, now George W. Bush can happily wave the Naivasha deal to his hysteria-driven supporters as he campaigns for a second term. Naivasha is meant to counter Bush's disastrous policy in Iraq.

One Nobel Prize to go to Bush! Hip, hip, hurray!!!

I do not know what are the criteria set up by the famous Swedish Academy for prize sharing but I dread to think that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and US Secretary of State Colin Powell would join in to form the most famous peace quintet of this millennium.

At the end of his visit to war-ravaged Darfur, and having seen the devastation caused by the violent campaign backed by Khartoum against its African citizens of the region, Secretary of State Colin Powell said 'Let's not put a label on things'. The nub of the matter is that we have to call the atrocities in Darfur by 'their rightful name' as Donald Payne, Democrat member of Congress for New Jersey and of the Congressional Black Caucus said recently. According to Payne, the atrocities committed in Darfur 'meet the requirements of the 1948 UN Convention on the prevention and the punishment of the crime of genocide and therefore we have a legal obligation under international law to act'. So why is everybody stalling? Why is no real decision taken? Time is running out for the people of Darfur and the atrocious memories of Rwanda are being revised while the US refuses to say the word.

But let us not play with words, meanings and legalities. Genocide has taken place in Darfur and ethnic cleansing is still being perpetrated because one million people could die before the end of this year if the international community, the UN and the US fail to intervene immediately to stop the killing and the displacement. Secretary Powell claims that he knows what the situation is like and that the US knows what it has to do and is going to do it – in other words, take real action.

Instead the US has circulated a resolution to member nations of the UN Security Council calling for sanctions against the Janjaweed militias, blaming them for what has been described as a 'humanitarian catastrophe' in Sudan and taking no action against the government of Omar el Bashir, the instigator of the ethnic cleansing in Darfur.

The sanctions are ridiculously irrational. They call for an arms embargo and travel restrictions on the Janjaweed militias. Is the United States serious when it circulates these sanctions to member nations of the UN Security Council? Does the Security Council really believe that the Janjaweed need travel documents to move from village to village to kill, rape, burn and destroy? As for an arms embargo, do the members of the UN Security Council really believe that the Janjaweed buy their weapons on the open market, with proper contracts and stamped and approved shipping documents, and that they, the supremos of the Security Council could stop these contracts? Are we to believe once again that these good people are being misled by erroneous 'intelligence' reports?

The western Sudanese region of Darfur is bordered by Chad, Libya and the Central African Republic, three states where gun running is child's play and where the Janjaweed face no arms embargo and need no license to buy their lethal weapons. In addition, as they have been provided with official Sudanese armed forces uniforms, one presumes they would also have free access to weapons and ammunition from the arsenals of the Sudanese army.

There is indeed a 'humanitarian catastrophe and a security crisis' in Darfur, as Secretary Colin Powell finally decided to acknowledge this week. But the humanitarian crisis is man made and its origins are political. The people of Darfur, like their compatriots on the peripheries (the South, Nuba Mountains and Eastern Sudan) have been marginalised by all the Sudanese regimes, which have taken power since independence in 1956. Democratic rule, as universally understood, was never on the agenda of these regimes. Dominated by the Northern elites, the centralised governments ruled from Khartoum, seldom interested in the plight of the regional people. Ironical as it may sound, the regional people of Sudan are in the large majority Africans – Nuba, Beja, Fur, Massaleit, Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Zaghawa and many others.

Because of the emergency of the humanitarian catastrophe, the political aspects of the Darfur crisis are being brushed aside. But, as many leading Darfur politicians have asked, the humanitarian intervention has to go hand in hand with a political solution so the 1.5million internally displaced people and refugees scattered on the Chadian borders can return safely to their farms and live in peace and security guaranteed by their constitutional rights as citizens of Sudan. While the ancestral lands of the African people of Darfur have to be restored to their rightful owners, there is no doubt that the Arab nomadic groups and the African settlers of Darfur have to live together, like they did for centuries and share the same resources – water and land – in an equitable way. This can be achieved if the political will is there. If Kofi Annan wants progress in 48 hours, this is what he should ask from the government and the Darfur factions who took up arms against Khartoum.



Darfur Beyond the Crossroads: Struggles of African Nationalism

Kwesi Kwaa Prah

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I HAVE HAD A CHANCE to look at Farid Omar's article 'Darfur at the Crossroads: Caught Between Western Hypocrisy and Muslim Complicity'. (Read it online at <http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/default.asp?2,40,5,461>.) My impression is that while I can agree with some of the arguments he makes I am also in disagreement about some factual and interpretative errors in his discussion. I am going through his piece almost paragraph by paragraph in order to lay bare the discrepancies and factual inadequacies.

For a start, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) have not been altogether silent about the genocide in Darfur, which is instigated, aided and abetted by the Khartoum government. In a recent report by the BBC, on 9 August 2004, entitled 'Arab League backs Sudan on Darfur', the reporter indicated that 'Arab Foreign Ministers at an emergency session in Cairo backed Khartoum's measures to disarm Arab militias and punish human rights violators. They called on the UN to give Sudan more time to resolve the conflict. And Sudanese Vice-President Ali Osman Taha said he thought the UN's end of August deadline was impractical.' In effect the report indicated that, 'the Arab League has rejected any sanctions or international military intervention as a response to the crisis in Sudan's Darfur region.' The Sudanese Vice-President Ali Osman Taha had indicated that, 'We are really committed to disarm whoever is acting outside the law'. But who armed the Janjaweed? He added that, 'comprehensive stability was only possible if both the Arab Janjaweed militia and rebel groups disarmed'.

It is possible to read into this, firstly, the indecisive and guarded complicity of the Arab League position on the tragedy of Darfur. Genocide is not something which can be given time to be reversed. The slaughter and butchery of 30,000 Furs (not Darfuris) is a matter which needs to be brought to a close immediately. In any part of the world today any extension beyond immediacy in terminating genocide would hardly be countenanced. In the present Sudanese conflict in Darfur with the Sudanese army plus the Janjaweed on one side and African nationalist rebels on the other, who are oppressors and oppressed?

Secondly, if you compare the stance of the Arab League to that of the United Nations you will notice an enormous gap in perception of the magnitude, dimensions and interpretation of the crisis. While some of us recognise genocide and ethnic cleansing in the crisis others see a question of disarming armed bandits and rebels as the heart of the matter. I am not aware of what the

OIC has or has not said, but I would agree with Farid Omar that they appear to be 'strangely silent'. If that is the case, then that certainly amounts to implicit complicity.

I share the view of Peter Takirambudde, chief of the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch, that Sudan is 'trying to manipulate opinion in the Arab world to hide the massive crimes it has committed against Sudanese citizens.'

Magdi Abdelhadi of the BBC has observed that:

there were no surprises in the Arab League statement and Khartoum got what it wanted. The statement welcomed measures already taken by the Sudanese government to disarm the Janjaweed and bring those responsible for human rights violations in Darfur to justice. The Arab foreign ministers also pledged to assist Sudan and the international community in resolving the conflict peacefully. The statement was very much in line with a report by an Arab League's fact-finding mission to Darfur earlier this year, which largely exonerated the Sudanese government from responsibility and laid the blame on a combination of factors, including protracted drought, tribal conflict and under-development in western Sudan.

Of course human rights violators should be brought to book. Human rights violations are unacceptable in the modern world, whether such violators are Americans in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Arab authorities in the Sudan, or human rights criminals in the Great Lakes area.

True enough:

While western hypocrisy on the situation in Darfur is really problematic, Muslim complicity in the Darfur mayhem is equally disturbing. The Muslim people and their allies around the world should stand up for Darfuris, denounce and expose western double standards and condemn the AL and the OIC for their inaction and failure to put pressure on Sudan to contain the crisis in Darfur.

There I have no problems with Farid Omar's views. But then he goes on to say that:

The western media has presented the political and humanitarian crisis in Darfur and broader conflict in Sudan as a race or religious war. This is a false paradigm. The conflict in Sudan is not one pitting the so-called Muslim-Arab North and the so-called Christian/animist South, or between the Arab Janjaweed militia working in collusion with the Sudanese government and the Black Africans in Darfur. The people of Sudan are all Africans, be they Black-Africans or Arab-Africans.

Here I have a bone to pick with Omar. Certainly the various conflicts or the

various fronts of war in the Sudan are not simply racial or religious. That is the crude and distorted simplification of the issue. But, we must not forget that the Fur are Muslims just like the Arabs in the Sudan. Therefore the conflict cannot be put down to religious differences. Then, what is it?

For years the Khartoum regime of Muslim fundamentalists have also been pursuing ethnic cleansing in the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan with genocidal overtones against the Nuba who are also mostly Muslims. A similar tactic has been in place there, that is, using local Arab militias working hand in glove with Sudanese army units against the Nuba. In the South of the country the conflict is of much longer standing and can be said to have commenced in August 1955, with a period of low intensity conflict between 1972 and 1983. Since 1983 over two million southern Sudanese have died as a result of the war.

In the case of the war in southern Sudan the international media has too often simplified the struggle as a conflict between a Christian and animist South against a Muslim North. The real fact of the matter is that it is a struggle between Arabs and Arabised Nubians and the Africans of the Sudan whether they are Fur, Zaghawa, Messalit and other similar groups in the west or the Ingessana in the east or the Beja/Hadendowa in the Kassala area adjacent to Eritrea. Some Nubians are now rejecting Arabism. The struggle in the Sudan is an age-old struggle between the forces for the Arabisation of Africans and African nationalism, which rejects Arabisation.

It is not simply a question of Islam against Christians and animists. I have in the past on many occasions indicated to friends in the Southern Sudan that they have for too long allowed their position to be sold short by playing to the international media and other interests which simply defined the struggle as one between Christians and animists in confrontation with Muslims. The explosion of media attention in the wake of the emergence of the Darfur crisis has underscored the falsity of the religious explanation of the conflict. If the Fur, Messalit, Zaghawa, Ingessana and Beja are Muslims certainly the struggle of the Sudan is not a religious conflict of Muslims and non-Muslims.

The history of the Arabs in the Sudan has been part of the history of the Arabs in Africa. Arabs entered Africa in the middle of the 7th century AD and have been steadily Arabising Africans starting with the Berbers of northern Africa, who to this day have to a degree been resisting Arabisation. The Sudan and Mauritania are possibly the most decisive flash points in this process. Will Africans steadily accept being culturally Arabised or will they resist Arabisation and remain culturally rooted in their histories?

This is the real question about the Sudan and Africa. I say that I believe Africans prefer to remain African and not to become Arabs. I say this without prejudice to Arabs or those Africans who have become Arabised and wish to remain so. Just as much as Arabs have the right to protect their identity, history and culture, Africans also have a similar right. Just as much as Arabs wish

to see the realisation of Arab unity (*el watani el arabi*), Africans also most fervently wish to see the unity of Africans. The Arab League with all its weaknesses represents contemporary aspirations of Arabs for Arab unity.

As I have often argued, for as long as the pursuit of this ideal is conducted democratically for the freedom of Arab peoples, the ideal deserves the support of all progressive and well meaning people. But this must not be allowed to proceed geographically, politically, economically and culturally at the expense of Africans. Where do the borders of the Arab world end and who are the people beyond the borders of the Arab world? Africans need to answer this question for themselves.

Today on the maps of the Arab League the Arab world includes about a third of Africa's geographical area. There are some of us who say enough is enough. No further expansion at the expense of Africans is tolerable. The notion Arab-Africans is a term used in the Sudan to hide the realities of Arabisation. It is a concept which has become in some ways a Trojan horse for Arab expansionism in Africa. Culturally and otherwise, people will always mix and adopt new identities, but this must not become a one-way route to Arabisation and the cultural denationalisation of Africans.

In the broad historical experience of Africans two imperialisms can be pointed to, Arab and Western imperialism. Historically, Arab imperialism in Africa is older than Western imperialism by a millennium. The day Africans realise that Arabs are not Africans and Africans are not Arabs, but that the two peoples must live together in peace and with humanity towards each other, their recognition of an African identity will have moved one step further. They will have made a decisive conceptual move towards the ultimate achievement of African unity. The unity of Africa embraces historically, culturally and psychologically more directly the African diaspora than the Arab north of Africa. In this sense, the African diaspora is central to Pan-Africanism and African unity.

In a manuscript I am currently writing I have made the point that, if we want to maintain the rigour of the logic of the diaspora link, we must, as Africans, define our reality on a historical and cultural basis. In this respect, geography is only useful in as far as it helps us to understand the historical and social process. We can, therefore, hardly define the reality of contemporary Africa as a geographical expression; that is, Africans being all who live on the continent of Africa. The argument has a resounding and irresistible flip-side, which is that, all who do not live on the continent or were not born on the continent, are not Africans. This is the distorted logic which pushes out the African diaspora. We must not equate citizenship with nationality or cultural identity. A state may have people of different nationalities.

I do not agree that the so-called:

race and religious analogy of the conflict is part of the ideological ploy of US imperialism to generate anti-Arab hostility

among African-Americans and Black Africans, to win support of African-Americans and Black African Christians for the US neo-Conservatives/Christian right project against Arab and Muslim Africans, and in particular against Sudanese Muslims. It is also aimed at undermining the long standing Afro-Arab solidarity that has historically striven against the forces of Western imperialism, colonialism, apartheid and the occupation in Palestine.

Of course Western imperialism must be denounced but so also must the Arabisation of Africans be fought. It is ridiculous to bracket African-Americans with US neo-conservatives in this way. It is at best disingenuous and at worst mischievous. The point, which the Darfur crisis has forcefully brought home to many Africans in the diaspora, is that ultimately the definition and identity of Africans cannot be based on colour. In the Sudan it is not possible to differentiate African from Arab on the basis of colour and I am sure that with television available worldwide many Africans in the diaspora who have for centuries been faced with white racism find it difficult to digest the fact that most Arabs in the Sudan have black faces. The point I have elsewhere made is that amongst Arabs colours range from black to blonde. The same is true for Jews. In years to come this may be more clearly true for Europeans.

Ultimately what defines an African from an Arab are cultural and historical belongings, not nature but nurture, not biology but rather culture. The black colour which is common for most Africans happens to be a miraculous bonus, in the sense that whereas most other major peoples of the world have other attributes they share as groups based on culture, religion, language, history and geography, mixed to different degrees, in the case of Africans in the absence of clearly unifying language and religion, colour has become a most useful blessing which makes most Africans recognisable from a good distance. But, in the future increasingly there will be many Africans who are not necessarily black. This is the way the world is moving and this is the future of humanity.

From my viewpoint, part of the tragedy of Darfur is that African nationalism in the Sudan has been conveniently split between what is going on in the west, south, east and northeast. Africans have so far failed to find sufficient ground to realise that they are all fighting the same war. The Arabist rulers in Khartoum have been clever at creating convenient and tactical truces, and thereby silencing and truncating the Southerner's struggle from the Fur, Ingessana, Nuba and Beja. This amounts to success for the policy of divide and rule, which has been used in the past with great skill by successive Arabist regimes in Khartoum, who fear and deny the predominant African character of the Sudan. What al Bashir and the Khartoum clique fear most is that the Arabist minority may lose control of the Sudan; that the African majority may exert its preponderant character.

It is most doubtful if the Arab League, in its present form, would readily accept a thoroughly democratic solution to the national question in the Sudan. But Africans are waking up. Sooner or later the African character of the Sudan as a democratic expression of the society will triumph.

I am happy with Farid Omar's philosophically inclusive sense of humanity. But, I fear the persistence of the confusion of Arab and African on the continent and beyond. This confusion, on this specific matter, appears to be more prevalent among Africans than non-Africans. We still do not seem to know or understand who we are. I hope we do not go into another major Pan-African meeting/congress with this confusion. If this happens, we would not have made any real headway since the last one. Let us not try to foist an African identity on people who do not want to be so regarded and who reject the African identity; who continue to despise and enslave Africans. I agree with Farid Omar when he says that, 'the root causes of the Sudanese conflict are primarily political and can be located in totalitarian tendencies that have over time, suppressed the evolution of popular democracy.' While this diagnosis is right the point has to be seen in relationship to the long history of oppression, slavery, war, ethnic cleansing and now genocide.

The suggestion that external forces have fanned the Sudanese conflict is grossly exaggerated and misplaced. Blaming the conflict on American arms and money and right-wing evangelical groups in the US does not do credit to the Africans of the Sudan. The Africans of the Sudan are a group oppressed by the minority Arab elite in the country. As for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the Sudan, we must remember that the Sudan as it is geographically represented today is like all African states an artificial creation of European powers. The British were anxious to control the whole of the Nile Basin in order to supply Egypt with its lifeline, the Nile waters.

Omar's contention that 'the Sudanese government either has no interest in resolving the crisis or lacks the capacity to do so' is spot on. As for the AU I agree with Farid Omar that the about '300 peace monitors it has deployed in Darfur is grossly inadequate.' Again Farid Omar's observation is pertinent when he writes that, 'Like the Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Conference, the Muslim and Arab media have also maintained a strange silence.' In sharp contrast to events in the Middle East, coverage on the horrific Darfuri scene by Al-Jazeera and other leading Arab satellite television stations such as the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya is dismally marginal. The failure by Muslim and Arab media to adequately cover the grisly events in Darfur smacks of complicity.

Africans need to read the correct lessons in the behaviour and attitude of the Arab media. The simple truth about all the wars in the Afro-Arab borderlands is that at best we should be able to nationally coexist in peace. But if we cannot live together in peace, then we must go our separate ways without ran-

cour, pain and mutual torment. The members of the global community have fortunately agreed as a standing international protocol, since the Treaty of Versailles, that in our times, nations and peoples have the right to self-determination.

This protocol applies equally to the African people of the Sudan.



How Can We Name the Darfur Crisis? Preliminary Thoughts on Darfur

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HOW CAN WE NAME the Darfur crisis? The US Congress, and now Secretary of State Colin Powell, claim that genocide has occurred in Darfur. The European Union says it is not genocide. And so does the African Union.

Nigerian President Obasanjo, also the current chair of the African Union, told a press conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York on September 23:

Before you can say that this is genocide or ethnic cleansing, we will have to have a definite decision and plan and programme of a government to wipe out a particular group of people, then we will be talking about genocide, ethnic cleansing. What we know is not that. What we know is that there was an uprising, rebellion, and the government armed another group of people to stop that rebellion. That's what we know. That does not amount to genocide from our own reckoning. It amounts to of course conflict. It amounts to violence.

Is Darfur genocide that has happened and must be punished? Or, is it genocide that could happen and must be prevented? I will argue the latter.

Sudan is today the site of two contradictory processes. The first is the Naivasha peace process between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the government of Sudan, whose promise is an end to Africa's longest festering civil war. The second is the armed confrontation between an insurgency and anti-government militias in Darfur. There is need to think of the south and the west as different aspects of a connected process. I will argue that this reflection should be guided by a central objective: to reinforce the peace process and to demilitarise the conflict in Darfur.

Understanding the Darfur Conflict Politically

The peace process in the South has split both sides to the conflict. Tensions within the ruling circles in Khartoum and within the opposition SPLA have given rise to two anti-government militias. The Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) has historical links to the Islamist regime, and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) to the southern guerrilla movement.

The Justice and Equality Movement organised as part of the Hassan Turabi faction of the Islamists. Darfur, historically the mainstay of the Mahdist movement, was Turabi's major claim to political success in the last decade. When

the Khartoum coalition – between the army officers led by Bashir and the Islamist political movement under Turabi – split, the Darfur Islamists fell out with both sides. JEM was organised in Khartoum as part of an agenda for regaining power. It has a more localised and multi-ethnic presence in Darfur and has been home to many who have advocated an ‘African Islam’.

The SLA is linked to SPLA, which first tried to expand the southern-based armed movement to Darfur in 1990, but failed. The radical leadership of that thrust was decapitated in a government assault. Not surprisingly, the new leadership of SLA has little political experience.

The present conflict began when the SLA mounted an ambitious and successful assault on El Fashar airport on 25 April 2003, on a scale larger than most encounters in the southern civil war.

The government in Khartoum is also divided, between those who pushed the peace process, and those who believe too much was conceded in the Naivasha talks. This opposition, the security cabal in Khartoum, responded by arming and unleashing several militia, known as the Janjaweed. The result is a spiral of state-sponsored violence and indiscriminate spread of weaponry.

In sum, all those opposed to the peace process in the south have moved to fight in Darfur, even if on opposing sides. The Darfur conflict has many layers; the most recent but the most explosive is that it is the continuation of the southern conflict in the west.

De-demonise Adversaries

For anyone reading the press today, the atrocities in Sudan are synonymous with a demonic presence, the Janjaweed, the spearhead of an ‘Arab’ assault on ‘Africans.’ The problem with the public discussion of Darfur and Sudan is not simply that we know little; it is also the representation of what we do know. To understand the problem with how known facts are being represented, I suggest we face three facts.

First, as a proxy of those in power in Khartoum, the Janjaweed are not exceptional. They reflect a broad African trend. Proxy war spread within the continent with the formation of Renamo by the Rhodesian and the South African security cabal in the early 1980s. Other examples in the East African region include the Lord’s Redemption Army in northern Uganda, the Hema and Lendu militias in Itori in eastern Congo and, of course, the Hutu militia in post-genocide Rwanda. Like the Janjaweed, all these combine different degrees of autonomy on the ground with proxy connections above ground.

Second, all parties involved in the Darfur conflict – whether they are referred to as ‘Arab’ or as ‘African’ – are equally indigenous and equally black. All are Muslims and all are local. To see how the corporate media and some of the charity-dependent international NGOs consistently racialise representations, we need to distinguish between different kinds of identities.

Let us begin by distinguishing between three different meanings of Arab: ethnic, cultural and political. In the ethnic sense, there are few Arabs worth speaking of in Darfur, and a very tiny percent in Sudan. In the cultural sense, Arab refers to those who have come to speak Arabic as a home language and, sometimes, to those who are nomadic in lifestyle. In this sense, many have become Arabs. From the cultural point of view, one can be both African and Arab, in other words, an African who speaks Arabic, which is what the 'Arabs' of Darfur are. For those given to thinking of identity in racial terms, it may be better to think of this population as 'Arabised' rather than 'Arab.'

Then there is Arab in the political sense. This refers to a political identity called 'Arab' that the ruling group in Khartoum has promoted at different points as the identity of power and of the Sudanese nation. As a political identity, Arab is relatively new to Darfur. Darfur was home to the Mahdist movement whose troops defeated the British and slew General Gordon a century ago. Darfur then became the base of the party organised around the Sufi order, the Ansar. This party, called the Umma Party, is currently led by the grandson of the Mahdi, Sadiq al-Mahdi. The major change in the political map of Darfur over the past decade was the growth of the Islamist movement, led by Hassan Turabi. Politically, Darfur became 'Islamist' rather than 'Arab.'

Like Arab, Islam too needs to be understood not just as a cultural (and religious) identity but also as a political one, thus distinguishing the broad category of believers called Muslims from political activists called Islamists. Historically, Islam as a political identity in the Sudan has been associated with political parties based on Sufi orders, mainly the Umma Party based on the Ansar and the DUP based on the Khatamiyya. In sharp contrast to the strongly Sudanese identity of these 'sectarian' and 'traditional' parties is the militant, modernist and internationalist orientation of the type of political Islam championed by Hassan Turabi and organised as the National Islamic Front (NIF). Not only in its predominantly urban social base but also in its methods of organisation, the NIF was poles apart from 'traditional' political Islam, and in fact consciously emulated the Communist Party. Unlike the 'traditional' parties, which were mass-based and hoped to come to power through elections, the NIF – like the CP – was a cadre-based vanguard party which hoped to take power in alliance with a faction in the army. The fulfillment of this agenda was the 1989 coup which brought Turabi's NIF into power in alliance with the Bashir faction in the army.

As a political identity, 'African' is even more recent than 'Arab' in Darfur. I have referred to an attempt by SPLA in 1990 to confront the power in Khartoum as 'Arab' and to rally the opposition under the banner of 'African.' Both the insurgency that began 18 months ago and the government's response to it are evidence of the crisis of the Islamist regime and the government's retreat to a narrower political identity, 'Arab'.

Third, both the anti- and the pro-government militia have outside sponsors, but they cannot just be dismissed as external creations. The Sudan government organised local militias in Darfur in 1990, using them both to fight the SPLA in the south and to contain the expansion of the southern rebellion to the west. The militias are not monolithic and they are not centrally controlled. When the Islamists split in 1999 between the Turabi and the Bashir groups, many of the Darfur militia were purged. Those who were not, like the Berti, retained a measure of local support. This is why it is wrong to think of the Janjaweed as a single organisation under a unified command.

Does that mean that we cannot hold the Sudan government responsible for the atrocities committed by Janjaweed militias that it continues to supply? No, it does not. We must hold the patron responsible for the actions of the proxy. At the same time, we need to realise that it may be easier to supply than to disband local militias. Those who start and feed fires should be held responsible for doing so; but let us not forget that it may be easier to start a fire than to put it out.

The fight between the militias on both sides and the violence unleashed against the unarmed population has been waged with exceptional cruelty. One reason may be that the initiative has passed from the communities on the ground to those contending for power. Another may be the low value on life placed by the security cabal in Khartoum and by those in the opposition who want power at any cost.

What is the Solution?

I suggest a three-pronged process in the Sudan. The priority must be to complete the Naivasha peace process and change the character of the government in Khartoum. Second, whatever the level of civilian support enjoyed by militias, it would be a mistake to tarnish the communities with the sins of the particular militia they support. On the contrary, every effort should be made to neutralise or re-organise the militia and stabilise communities in Darfur through local initiatives. This means both a civic conference of all communities – both those identified as Arab and those as African – and reorganised civil defence forces of all communities. This may need to be done under the protective and supervisory umbrella of an African Union policing force. Finally, to build on the Naivasha process by bringing into it all those previously excluded. To do so will require creating the conditions for a reorganised civil administration in Darfur.

To build confidence among all parties, but particularly among those demonised as 'Arab', we need to use the same standard for all. To make the point, let us first look at the African region. The UN estimates that some 30,000–50,000 people have been killed in Darfur and another 1.4 million or so have been made homeless. The figure for the dead in Congo over the last few years is over four million. Many have died at the hands of ethnic Hema or

Lendu militias. These are Janjaweed-type militias known to have functioned as proxies for neighbouring states. In the northern Ugandan districts of Acholiland, over 80 per cent of the population has been interned by the government, given substandard rations and nominal security, thus left open to gradual premeditated starvation and periodic kidnapping by another militia, the Lord's Redemption Army (LRA). When the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, flew to Khartoum recently, I was in Kampala. The comment I heard all around was: Why didn't he stop here? And why not in Kigali? And Kinshasa? Should we not apply the same standards to the governments in Kampala and Kigali and elsewhere as we do to the government in Khartoum, even if Kampala and Kigali are America's allies in its global 'war on terror'?

Internationally, there is the daunting example of Iraq. Before the American invasion, Iraq went through an era of UN sanctions, which were kept in place for a decade by the US and Britain. The effect of the sanctions came to light when UNICEF carried out a child mortality survey in 1999 at the initiative of Canada and Brazil. Richard Garfield, professor of Clinical International Nursing at Columbia University and chair of the Human Rights Committee of the American Public Health Association calculated 'on a conservative estimate' that there had been 300,000 'excess deaths' of children under 5 in Iraq during the sanctions. But the sanctions continued. Today, the US does not even count the number of Iraqi dead, and the UN has made no attempt to estimate them. Iraq is not history. It continues to bleed.

This backdrop, regional and international, should prompt us to ask at least one question: Does the label 'worst humanitarian crisis' tell us more about Darfur or about those labelling and the politics of labelling? Are we to return to a Cold War-type era in which America's allies can commit atrocities with impunity while its adversaries are demagogically held accountable to an international standard of human rights?

Some argue that international alignment on the Darfur crisis is dictated by the political economy of oil. To the extent this is true, let us not forget that oil influences both those (such as China) who would like continued access to Sudan's oil and those (such as the USA) who covet that access. But for those who do strategic thinking, the more important reason may be political. For official America, Darfur is a strategic opportunity to draw Africa into the global 'war on terror' by sharply drawing lines that demarcate 'Arab' against 'African', just as for the crumbling regime in Khartoum this very fact presents a last opportunity to downplay its own responsibilities and call for assistance from those who oppose official America's 'war on terror.'

What Should We Do?

First of all, we the civilians – and I address Africans and Americans in particular – should work against a military solution. We should work against a US

intervention, whether direct or by proxy, and however disguised – as humanitarian or whatever. We should work against punitive sanctions. The lesson of Iraq sanctions is that you target individuals, not governments. Sanctions feed into a culture of terror, of collective punishment. Its victims are seldom its target. Both military intervention and sanctions are undesirable and ineffective.

Second, we should organise in support of a culture of peace, of a rule of law and of a system of political accountability. Of particular importance is to recognise that the international community has created an institution called the International Criminal Court to try individuals for the most heinous crimes, such as genocide, war crimes and systematic rights abuses. The US has not only refused to ratify the treaty setting up the ICC, it has gone to all lengths to sabotage it. For Americans, it is important to get their government to join the ICC. The simple fact is that you can only claim the moral right to hold others accountable to a set of standards if you are willing to be held accountable to the same standards.

Finally, there is need to beware of groups who want a simple and comprehensive explanation, even if it is misleading; who demand dramatic action, even if it backfires; who have so come to depend on crisis that they risk unwittingly aggravating existing crisis. Often, they use the call for urgent action to silence any debate as a luxury. And yet, responsible action needs to be informed.

For the African Union, Darfur is both an opportunity and a test. The opportunity is to build on the global concern over a humanitarian disaster in Darfur to set a humanitarian standard that must be observed by all, including America's allies in Africa. And the test is to defend African sovereignty in the face of official America's global 'war on terror.' On both counts, the first priority must be to stop the war and push the peace process.

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