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The ongoing conflict in the Western Sudanese region of Darfur has received an unprecedented amount of attention, especially in the West, from the international media and human rights organizations, and has captured the attention of millions of ordinary global citizens. Those seeking to learn about the conflict, as well as those who have reported on it, often rely on information produced by the various governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations that are involved in addressing the humanitarian crises spawned by the conflict. As a result much of what has been written about the conflict tends to be either aid-oriented or journalistic in nature and often lacks a strong understanding of the historical, economic, political, sociological and environmental factors that have contributed to the conflict. While the most recent scholarship on the conflict has sought to include more Sudanese voices, the perspectives of Sudanese women, and those that are directly affected by the war have not been adequately heard.

This edited volume addresses major lacunas in the scholarship on the war in Darfur by providing a broad range of essays that explores the multiplicity of factors that have given rise to what has been called “the first genocide of the twenty first century.” The essays engage in careful analysis of the historical, geo-political, military, social, environmental, and economic roots of the conflict, and reflect on the contemporary realities that shape the experiences of those living in the region. Importantly, as several of the essays attest to, within Sudan formidable pre-existing, as well as newly formed multi-regional and multi-ethnic movements and civil society organizations have organized themselves around the issue of Darfur. This often neglected development is but one indication that if solutions to the conflict are to be found they must be developed in dialogue with ongoing internal efforts to deal with the range of issues that have given rise not only to the war in Darfur, but also to the larger interlocking political crisis in Sudan.

Composed of essays that have been specially written for this volume, as well as key previously published essays, this volume brings together many of the leading thinkers and activists involved in understanding and proactively addressing the situation in Darfur and in Sudan more generally. This collection of essays, moreover, builds upon the work of Alex de Waal, Martin Daly’s historical overview Darfur’s Sorrow: A History of Destruction and Genocide, and Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed and Leif Manger’s recently published edited volume, Understanding the Crisis in Darfur: Listening to Sudanese Voices, by continuing to provide nuanced analyses of the root causes, manifestations, and implications of the ongoing conflict in Darfur. The solid foundation laid by these ground-breaking publications has given us more freedom to select essays that delve into quite focused examinations of individual aspects of the crises.
The first section of the book, “Origins and Evolution of the Conflict” opens with an essay by Benaiah Yongo-Bure that assesses the conflict in Darfur in relationship to the North/South civil war, and the wider practice of marginalization by the Sudanese state. This is followed by Ali B. Ali Dinar’s contribution, which makes a call for greater analytical clarity in discerning patterns of continuity and change within the history of conflict in Darfur, and argues that while the current conflict in Darfur shares common denominators with past conflicts, its size, scale, and the nature of destruction, set it apart from previous patterns of violence. Atta El Batahani, who has written extensively on Darfur and the environment, argues that a convergence of local, national, and environmental factors has led to actual homicide in Darfur with increasing potential for genocide. Abdullahi Osman El Tom takes a hard look at the racial politics of exclusion practiced by the Sudanese state and argues that Darfuris have been marginalized by the state’s conscious effort to project itself as an Arab-Islamic nation. The first section finishes with an essay by former Sudan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mansour Khalid, who brings his long-standing experience as a scholar and leading member of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) to bear on the interlocking crises that have spawned the war in Darfur.

Section two, “Representations of the War in Darfur,” includes four essays that focus on representations of the war. Mahmood Mamdani and Salah M. Hassan highlight the strategic and selective ways in which the conflict has been presented, represented, and used by a range of actors in and outside of Sudan to promote their own agendas and interests. Carina Ray looks specifically at the way in which the conflict has been reported on and represented in the African press, and probes what the African press can tell us about African understandings, opinions and concerns in relation to Darfur. The final contribution to this section is a photographic essay by accomplished Sudanese photographer, Issam A. Abdelhafiez. Abdelhafiez’s gripping photographs perhaps best symbolize our commitment to bringing a human face to the conflict by showing Darfuris in the full complexity of their lives, rather than as a monolithic group whose victimization is the only salient component of their identities, as is often the case in the widely circulated existing visual images of the conflict.

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Section three, “Gender, War, and Violence” looks collectively at a particularly troubling aspect of the war in Darfur: its devastating effects on women. Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf looks comparatively at the way in which violence against Southern Sudanese and Darfuri women has been used as a mechanism by which men seek to prove their masculinity and power over other men. While persistent violence has forestalled the promotion of women’s rights, Abusharaf also contends that it has sharpened women’s awareness of themselves as political subjects and in the best-case scenario may lead to new avenues of self-empowerment. Karin Willemse essay offers insightful analyses of how the politics of marginalization in relation to notions of citizenship and gender are implicated in the Darfur war by looking at the predicament of young Darfuri men and the challenges facing them. The section is concluded by Fahima Al-Hashim’s contribution, which provides a sense of how the sexual violence associated with the conflict is experienced at a gendered and interior level and provides key insights into how grassroots organizations in the Sudan are responding to these issues.

Section four, “Darfur: Law, Human Rights and Prosecution,” begins with noted Sudanese lawyer, writer and activist, Kamal al-Gizouli’s astute analysis of the confrontation between the current Sudanese regime and the International Criminal Court over the prosecution of war crimes in Darfur. Grant Farred’s essay offers a philosophical meditation on the relationship between violence and the fate of Sudan’s longstanding civil society tradition. Amira Khair and Adrienne Fricke’s jointly authored contribution provides insight into the significant difficulties involved in prosecuting sex crimes in the context of the ongoing conflict, and in Sudan more generally, as well as the great risks women face in bringing such charges to official notice.
Section five, “Sudanese Civil Society, the State, and the Struggle for Peace in Darfur,” opens with Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil’s thoughtful reflections on how the strategic niche that schoolteachers fill in Sudanese society, and particularly in North Darfur, has allowed them to play a particularly prominent role in shaping how the conflict in Darfur has unfolded. Abdul-Jalil finds that in many instances schoolteachers have acted in ways that have led to the escalation of the conflict, giving new meaning to the idea of “conflict management.” Abaker Mohamed Abuelbashar’s essay draws on his firsthand experience as a representative of the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) at the Abuja peace talks (2004-2006), in order to provide an account of why the lengthy peace talks were unable to successfully broker a resolution to the war. In their contributions, Salih Mahmoud Osman and Al-Tayib Zain Al Abdin, look at the manifold ways in which various civil society organizations have approached the Darfur crisis. Yasir Arman’s concluding piece outlines the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement’s (SPLM) vision for unifying the Darfur rebel movements and bringing peace and stability to the region.

**PART TWO**

**Appendix A:** Seekers of Truth and Justice, “The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan, Part I”

**Appendix B:** Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, “Black Book of Sudan: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan (in Arabic): A REVIEW”

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**Chapter Twenty:** Yasir Arman, “Peace and Unification of Darfur Rebel Movements: Report on SPLM Efforts and Vision”

**Part Two** reproduces an array of primary and secondary sources, giving readers access to otherwise hard to find documents that chart critical moments in the war in Darfur and the still unfolding efforts to resolve the conflict. These documents include manifestos and proposals by the major Darfuri rebel groups, important United Nations resolutions, and excerpts from The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan, along with an annotated bibliography of the major scholarly works on Darfur by Eric Acree.
Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan is a groundbreaking critical reader that brings together many of the leading thinkers and activists involved in understanding and proactively addressing the situation in Darfur and Sudan more generally. The volume is composed of a range of essays that engage in careful analysis of the historical, geo-political, military, social, environmental, and economic roots of the conflict, and reflect on the contemporary realities shaping the experiences of those living in the region. It is our hope that the volume’s cross-disciplinary offerings will foster a comprehensive, yet nuanced understanding of the root causes, manifestations, and implications of the ongoing conflict, and help generate more informed prospects for a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict.

Published in conjunction with a major international conference held at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University in February 2008, Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan, is composed of two parts:

Part One includes essays by leading Sudanese academics, intellectuals, activists, civil society representatives, and members of government and Darfur rebel factions, along with essays by scholars based in Europe and the United States. The writers include: Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, Abaker Mohamed Abuelbashar, Roaga Mustafa Abusharaf, Al-Tayib Zain Al-Abdin, Yasir Arman, Atta El-Batahani, Kamal El Gizouli, Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, Grant Farred, Adrienne Fricke, Fahima Hashim, Salah Hassan, Amira Khair, Mansour Khalid, Mahmood Mamdani, Salih Mahmoud Osman, Carina Ray, Karin Willemsen, and Beniaiah Yongo-Bure. Part One also features a visual essay by Sudanese photographer Issam A. Abdelhafiez.

Part Two reproduces an array of primary and secondary sources, giving readers access to otherwise hard to find documents that chart critical moments in the war in Darfur and the still unfolding efforts to resolve the conflict. These documents include manifestos and proposals by the major Darfuri rebel groups, important United Nations resolutions, and excerpts from The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in Sudan, along with an annotated bibliography of the major scholarly works on Darfur.

Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan is essential reading for anyone who is interested in understanding the range of issues that has given rise not only to the war in Darfur, but also the larger interlocking political crisis in Sudan. It also serves as an important indication of the great extent to which Sudanese people, both in Sudan and the diaspora, are engaged in a critical discussion and vigorous activism around the fate of a nation that hangs in the balance.

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