

UMM KWAKIYYA OR THE DAMNATION OF DARFUR:¹

SOME RECENT BOOKS

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Ahmed, Abdel Ghaffar M. and Leif Manger, *Understanding the Crisis in Darfur. Listening to Sudanese voices*. Bergen: Centre for Development Studies, 2006, 113 pp.

Al-Buhayri, Zaki, *Mushkilat Darfur. al-budhur al-ta'rikhiyya: al-ab'ad al-ijtima'iyya: al-taturat al-siyasiyya* [The Darfur Crisis: historical background, social dimensions and political developments]. Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2006, 350 pp., ill.

Flint, Julie and Alex De Waal. *Darfur. A short History of a Long War*. London: Zed Books, xiv +152 pp.

Muhammad, Adam al-Zayn and al-Tayyib Ibrahim Wadi, eds., *al-Niza'at al-qabaliyya fi 'l-Sudan* [Tribal Conflicts in the Sudan]. Khartoum: The Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1998, 302 pp.

Muhammad, Adam al-Zayn ed., *Al-Tanmiyya: miftah al-salam fi-Dar Fur* [Development: the Key to Peace in Darfur], Khartoum: Centre for Peace and Development Studies, University of Juba, and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2003, 310 pp.

Prunier, Gérard, *Darfur. The Ambiguous Genocide*. London: Christopher Hurst 2005, xxiii +212 pp.

Sudanese Media Center, *Darfur. The Absent Truth*. Khartoum, January 2005, 248 pp.

Tubiana, Marie-José, *Carnets de Route au Dar For*. Saint-Maur-des-Fosses: Sepia, 2006, 222 pp.

'Uthman, 'Abd al-Jabbar 'Uthman, *Ta'rikh al-Zaghawa fi-Tshad wa'l-Sudan* [The History of the Zaghawa in Chad and the Sudan], Cairo: al-Misriyya al-duwaliyya li'l-da'iyya wa'l-tawrid, 2006, 407 pp.

I have deliberately waited awhile before venturing to review books on Darfur, confident that what began as a trickle in 2005 will soon become a flood of books on the crisis there.² And there is no reason to think that the flood will abate because of the very wobbly and one-sided peace agreement signed last year in Abuja (5 May 2006) by only one of the now numerous Darfur rebel factions. There is an inverse ratio at work here, the less the mythical international community actually does anything about Darfur, the more will be written about it.³

¹ *Umm Kwakiyya* was the term used by my informants in the 1970s to describe the period, 1874 to 1898, when following the destruction of the first sultanate, Darfur experienced all the miseries that it is presently enduring. I never had a precise translation of *kwakiyya*, but it evidently meant something like "the mother of damnation"; there is a Sudanese Arabic word sounding like *kwakiyya* meaning "gunfire".

² By Darfur, I mean the colonial province, whose boundaries approximated to those of the sultanate (c. 1650-1916), an area about the size of France. The tripartite division into Western, Southern and Northern states in 1994 is regarded by most Darfurians with distaste, who refer to the old province as *Darfur kabira* or *kubra* "Greater Darfur".

³ Here I must count myself among the sinners since I shall publish later this year, *Darfur. A History* (London: Christopher Hurst), a revised and expanded (bringing the story to the present) version of my

Let me take a tour through the books listed above; Dr. al-Buhayri is professor of modern history at the University of al-Mansura (Egypt), who has previously written on the social and economic history of the Sudan; here he has written a workmanlike book on the crisis in Darfur, which emphasises reasonably enough the ecological and sociological factors behind the crisis. Of course, a strength of the book lies its use of Arabic-language sources; for example, he reproduces the agreement resulting from a meeting in al-Fashir held between 15 April and 8 July 1989 between the Fur and some Arab tribes, mainly the northern Rizayqat, which produced a businesslike document, dealing essentially with livestock routes, the timing of these routes to the benefit of both nomad and farmer, ownership and protection of gum (*hashab*) gardens, the role of the tribal administration (*idara ahliyya*) in dealing with disputes, etc. Dr. al-Buhayri's work illustrates the point that there is no monolithic Arab viewpoint on Darfur, although there is a tendency to accept the Khartoum Government's views uncritically.

Flint and De Waal is a work of reportage; a concise and well-documented account of the origin of the conflict in Darfur and its course until 2005. It gives a very clear-sighted account of the origins and motivations of the *Janjaweed* or Arab nomad militias within the conflict and useful biographies of most of the main actors. Flint and De Waal is the book I would first give anyone wanting to become acquainted with the crisis in Darfur.

The three books edited by Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed and Leif Manger, Adam al-Zayn Muhammad and al-Tayyib Ibrahim Wadi, and Muhammad and others hang together in that they comprise a series of case studies centred on tribal conflict, marginality and environmental degradation largely written by a group of Sudanese sociologists, economists, political scientists and social anthropologists, many of Darfurian origin. As such, they have an authority, and not least detail, that studies from the outside can not match. Some of the studies in the two Arabic works are to be found in English in the volume edited by Ahmed and Manger. The two volumes in Arabic, published with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, are by far the most important studies written on the root causes of conflict in Darfur. The 1998 volume includes, "The culture of war among the nomads and tribalism and the State" (Qaysar Musa al-Zayn); "Change in Society and its Impact on tribal conflict in the Sudan" (Adam al-Zayn Muhammad); "The tribe, tribalism and conflict in the Sudan" (Munzul 'Abd Allah Munzul); "Causes of tribal conflict in the Sudan" (al-Tijani Mustafa Muhammad Salih); "The causes of traditional and future tribal conflicts in the Sudan" (Nazik al-Tayyib Rabbah Ahmad); "An analysis of the consequences of the people's war in the Nuba Mountains, 1985-1998" (Hamid al-Bashir Ibrahim); "Some consequences of tribal conflict in the Sudan" (Sharaf al-Din al-Amin 'Abd al-Salam); "The various stages in the appearance of tribal conflict in Darfur" (Yusuf Tikna, with detailed documentation), and two studies by senior police officers on the role of intertribal reconciliation meetings (pp.263-64 for a detailed list) and of the police (al-Tayyib 'Abd al-Rahman Mukhtar and Muhammad al-Fadl 'Abd al-Karim).

The 2003 volume focuses more on the issues of marginality and regional inequality, development strategies, Darfur/Chad relations and opens with a powerful essay on "Development; the key to peace in Darfur" by Adam al-Zayn Muhammad (the volume includes twelve case studies). The Ahmed/Manger volume includes "Land tenure, land use and inter-ethnic conflicts in Darfur" (Musa Adam 'Abd al-Jalil); "Towards a typology and periodization schema of conflicts in Darfur region of Sudan" (Atta El-Battahan) and "Conflict and conflict reduction in Darfur" (Mustafa Babiker). To reiterate, the two Arabic volumes are crucial to any understanding of the crisis in Darfur, even if they tend to downplay the political

State and Society in Dar Fur (London: Christopher Hurst, 1980). My excuse is that the latter has long been out of print and much of importance has been written since 1980.

factors. All three books are crucial to an understanding of the crisis in Darfur and the two Arabic works should be translated.

Let me continue with Prunier; the author, an experienced French political scientist, is perhaps best known for his superb work on the genocide in Rwanda.⁴ Unfortunately Prunier is nowhere near at home in Darfur as he is in Rwanda, and it shows throughout the present work. *Darfur* opens with an ethnographic description and an introduction to the pre-colonial history of Darfur. The present reviewer admits to being somewhat irritated by the numerous misreadings and misunderstandings of what I have written on these topics.⁵ But there are more substantive issues, which I shall pursue in the rest of the article and which are germane to a number of the books reviewed here.

The heart of the book is a political science analysis of the late colonial period (1916-56) and the politics of Darfur in a Sudanese and a regional context since independence in 1956. In one sense it feeds into the huge literature on the North/South conflict that has dominated the Sudan's history since the mutiny of the Equatorial Corps in 1955, that is before formal independence, a conflict seemingly brought to an end by the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 January 2005 between the Khartoum Government and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). The North/South conflict was, in media terms, easier to understand, a war between Arabs and Africans, a war between Muslims and, largely, non-Muslims, between centre and periphery. Seen in these terms the North/South conflict could be described and analysed in a comprehensible manner, and indeed seized upon as a cause by, among others, the American evangelical right. Darfur does/did not fit easily into this paradigm; all in Darfur are Muslim (with the exception of small Southern communities in the cities) and the Arab/African divide is largely fictitious. The potentiality of a Darfur problem in the 1950s and 60s was hidden; symptomatic of this is that in the negotiations between the British and the Northern Sudanese political elite between 1953-55, the Southern question was very much part of the negotiations. Darfur was never mentioned. Why?

Because there was an assumption that because all in Darfur were Muslim, they were necessarily "Northerners" and thus could be ruled and/or manipulated by the Northern political elite. There was some truth behind this assumption. Under the British, there was little or no development in Darfur; for young Darfurian men, there were from the 1930s onwards, basically, two options, to join the army or work in the Gezira cotton fields. If they opted for the former, they often ended fighting in the South under Northern officers, if the latter they came under the influence of the Mahdist or Umma political movement; they were thus either cannon or voting fodder. This continued long after independence, but with the added dimension that what little development there was in Darfur (largely around Nyala and the southwest) was in the hands of the *jallaba*, Northern Sudanese traders, the ethnic kin of the ruling quasi-colonial administration based in the *Mudiriyya* or province headquarters in al-Fashir.⁶

⁴ *The Rwanda Crisis, 1959-1994. History of a genocide*, London: Christopher Hurst, 1995.

⁵ I shall not burden this review with a catalogue of these; just a few will suffice. p. 6, no one speaks Fulbe—the Fulbe speak Fulfulde; p. 10 'Ajjam does not mean "Barbarian", but someone whose first language is not Arabic; my analysis of the "feudal" land tenure system under the sultans is completely misrepresented on pp. 12-13, etc.

⁶ When I first went to Darfur in 1969, I recognised this fact of a quasi-colonial administration very quickly, not least because I had grown up in colonial Kenya. There was the army officers' club, the civil service club, the khaki uniforms, the magnificent Greek-owned open-air cinema; all were very much Northern enclaves. One governor apologetically left me in the care of his deputy, since he was going on leave to hunt foxes in Dorsetshire.

The first stirrings of Darfur discontent came in the mid-1960s with various movements, "Suni" and "Red Fire", largely Fur in membership (the largest ethnic group in Darfur) and largely the work of disgruntled soldiers returning from the South. A change came in 1966 with the establishment of the Darfur Development Front, in which the small group of Darfur students at the University of Khartoum attempted to mediate between the tribal ruling establishment at home and the national political establishment in Khartoum. At first, this mediatory role was quite successful, but there was a tendency for Darfur interests to be subordinated to those of the centre.

There is a fundamental problem in writing about Darfur in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that will tax all of us who try to do so, and that is how to integrate analytically environmental and political processes and to show convincingly how these processes interact upon each other. Prunier does not try in any convincing way, but in fairness to him, I think we simply do not have the informational basis (there has been precious little research in Darfur in the 90s) or, I suspect, as yet the methodological sophistication, to do so. Let me continue with some brute facts.

In 1955-56, as a parting present, the British organised the one and only detailed census of the Sudan.⁷ The figure arrived at for Darfur was 1.5 million; the current estimate of Darfur's population is about 6.25 to 6.5 million and is frankly unbelievable.⁸ This would seem a phenomenal growth in an area of such ecological fragility.

Concomitant with the human population growth is the growth in livestock, the one consistently profitable, although varyingly, Darfur export. With some 26 million head of livestock and an annual growth rate of about 3.5%, Darfur accounts for about 18% of the Sudan's national herd.⁹ Again, the British left a legacy of eight "approved" *marahil* or livestock routes and local agreements on grazing rights.

The human and livestock growth have pressed down on an area subject to desertification, growing loss of soil fertility, lack of fertilizer and investment possibilities, inappropriate mechanised farming technologies etc. The result has been a slowly developing, but now rapidly speeding up, ecological tragedy. Our knowledge of this tragedy is based on the researches of Fuad Ibrahim and Alex de Waal in the 1970s and 80s, but far more empirical research is needed.¹⁰

These ecological changes, to use no stronger a term, were played out against what were in retrospect disastrous political changes. Here, we need some history: in 1874 a Northern Sudanese slave trader, al-Zubayr Pasha, employing rifle-using slave troops invaded and conquered Darfur. The result was to subject Darfur to a period, 1874-1898, of famine, rapine etc., more or less the same as that it has been going through in recent decades. In September 1898, when the British were poised to put an end to the Mahdist state at the battle of Omdurman, the then titular sultan of Darfur, a prisoner in Omdurman, 'Ali Dinar, and a group of Darfur chiefs returned rapidly to Darfur and re-established the sultanate. It suited the

⁷ *First Population Census of Sudan, 1955/1956*, 3 vols., Khartoum 1961-62.

⁸ This is the conventional estimate used by the international organizations, but it is difficult to establish the basis for it. My colleague in Bergen, Ståle Dyrvik, a demographic historian, looking at the figures I put before him simply refused to believe the 6.25 to 6.5 million figure could be correct.

⁹ USAID, *Steps Towards the Stabilization of Governance and Livelihoods in Darfur, Sudan*, March 2005.

¹⁰ Fuad N. Ibrahim, *Desertification in North Darfur*, Hamburg 1980, & Alex de Waal, *Famine that Kills: Darfur (Sudan) 1984-1985*, 2nd. Edn., Oxford 2004. Another useful book is James Morton, *The Poverty of Nations. The aid dilemma at the heart of Africa*, London 1994, in which he draws on his seven years of experience in Darfur.

British to allow this to happen, although they regarded Darfur as belonging to the Sudan.¹¹ In 1916, worried that the French, their erstwhile allies in the First World War, might be tempted to encroach on Darfur from Chad, the British invaded Darfur, killed 'Ali Dinar and annexed Darfur to the Sudan.

'Ali Dinar, between 1898 and 1916, had successfully restored the sultanate (he had the advantage of being unburdened by Khartoum or by the UN Security Council) and the British, on taking over, saw no particular reason to change his system, nor indeed did they have the resources — British administration in Darfur was minimalist in the extreme (there were in all about 90-100 British administrators in Darfur between 1916-56). The old sultanic order was kept intact more or less throughout the colonial period and survived into the era of independence. This changed, when in May 1969, a military coup under Ja'far al-Numayri brought a government to power in Khartoum committed to Arabism, Socialism and modernity. High on its agenda was the abolition of "native administration" as being retrograde and unmodern. So the chieftancies and their courts were abolished and young men (mainly Northerners), graduates of the School of Local Administration at the University of Khartoum, were brought in to run Darfur.

What 'Ali Dinar had understood, as did the British, was that Darfur was run through a system of "controlled violence", that is in an area of ethnic and ecological diversity, of permeable borders across which ethnicities can change very rapidly, of disparities of power, and very long ethnic memories, mechanisms for averting or containing violence were vital. These mechanisms came from above and below; from below they were embodied in practices like *diya* or "blood compensation" (sometimes called *sadaqa*), reconciliation across ethnic boundaries (*sulh* or *musallaha*, mediated by the "elders" or *ajawid*) and the like, designed to minimize or contain violence. These institutionalized forms of conflict resolution, which were not formally judicial procedures, had as a fundamental purpose the avoidance of the involvement of the centre. From above, under the sultans, if a conflict ended up in al-Fashir, there was only one punishment, death. This system continued under the British, who could alone inflict the death penalty.

The destruction of the old order, or its delegitimation simply meant that the mechanisms for controlling violence were no longer in place. This loss of legitimacy was being played out against environmental changes that were scarcely understood at the time. With the politicization of the conflict from the mid-90s, the response of the Khartoum Government was to arm Arab nomad militias, the *janjawid*, which in turn produced political movements of resistance. The conflict became internationalized in 2003 and the situation has deteriorated drastically ever since.¹²

To conclude: of the last three books, *Darfur. The Absent Truth* is a mishmash of nonsense rendered virtually unreadable by its barbarous English; inasmuch as it can be deciphered, the book's central theme seems to be that the Darfur crisis is the work of malevolent outsiders. But it was entertaining to discover that those of us at the University of Bergen who write on the Sudan, as indeed the whole Norwegian Government apparently, are but creatures of Israeli Mossad agents and the World Zionist Conspiracy (pp. 103-4).

¹¹ See further my "Does Darfur have a future in the Sudan?", *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 30/1, 2006, 27-39. In the same issue will be found Professor Adam Azzain Mohammed, "The problem of uneven regional development in the Northern Sudan", 41-59 which documents in detail the marginality of Darfur in relation to the central northern Sudan.

¹² The horrendous human cost of the crisis will be documented in detail in Eric Reeves, *A Long Day's Dying*, Ontario: The Key Publishing House, 2007.

The last two books concern the Zaghawa, who straddle the border between Darfur and Chad and who have played a complex role in the history and politics of both lands from at least the eighteenth century until today.

'Uthman's history of the Zaghawa is a *tour de force*; his work has to be regarded as marking a major milestone in the historiography of Darfur and of Chad, being a formidably well-documented and judicious account of the history of the Zaghawa in Chad and Darfur. Its strength lies in the fact that the author has read more or less every work pertinent to his topic (in a variety of languages), has revisited many of the major historical episodes with a fresh eye and has been unafraid to come up with new interpretations, reinforced by a very wide range of oral informants, which gives his work a great freshness of interpretation. 'Uthman has something new to say on almost all aspects of Zaghawa history.

The book appears to have its origin in a doctoral thesis from the University of Khartoum in 2000. I can only summarize here some of its main themes: the Berber origins of the Zaghawa (pp. 49-76): the emergence of the tribes, kingdoms and clans of the Zaghawa in Chad and Darfur (pp. 77-163, ending with an interesting section on the Zaghawa and Islam): the relationship of the Zaghawa to the sultanates of Wadai and Darfur and to the Sanusiyya Sufi movement based in Libya, here especially the Sanusiyya and the Bideyat (a cognate group to the Zaghawa; pp. 164-223): the relationship between the Zaghawa and Turco-Egyptian rule in Darfur (1874-82) and to the Mahdiyya (1882-98: pp. 224-281): the Zaghawa and Sultan 'Ali Dinar, and the accommodation/settlement (*al-amn* is the term the author uses) between the two sides (pp. 286-319) and, finally the Zaghawa and the French and the British (pp. 320-359). The book concludes with a very informative and useful list of informants and a full and solid list of archival sources and published works (not least those of Marie-José Tubiana noted below).

I can only salute the author's endeavour with the greatest possible respect; I hope in the future to write a more detailed review of this important work.

To end with my, for personal reasons, favourite book: Marie-José Tubiana's *Carnets de Route*. These are the travel diaries in Darfur between 1965 and 1970 of Professor Marie-José Tubiana, a French ethnographer, who together with her husband, the late Professor Joseph Tubiana, has devoted her life to the study of all aspects of the history, physical and social anthropology, ecology and culture of the Zaghawa people of Chad and the Sudan. It is invidious to single out any one work from Madame Tubiana's *oeuvre*, but the book I learnt most from, as a young man, is her *Survivances préislamiques en Pays Zaghawa*, Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie 1964, while the book I most cherish is *Contes Zaghawa* (with Joseph Tubiana), recently (2004) reprinted.

Carnets are the down-to-earth travel diaries of journeys by Madame Tubiana and her husband in Darfur's Dar Zaghawa, enriched by many lively and telling photographs of people and places. It is a book that will be savoured by a small group of outsiders that knew Darfur at that time, but it also documents indirectly Darfur "before the storm", when the province was still seemingly a quiet backwater. I think towards the middle of the 70s the Tubianas and I began to sense that trouble was ahead, but it was still beyond the immediate horizon. Reality is brought home in an epilogue to *Carnets* by Madame Tubiana's son, Jérôme Tubiana, who has been working recently in Darfur for Action Contre le Faim. Jérôme meets in al-Fashir *malik* 'Ali Muhmmadayn of Umm Boru, whose family archive of charters from the sultans about their land was photographed by Jérôme's mother and father in 1965. In 2004 the archive was destroyed by the *Janjawid* when they pillaged Umm Boru. Unbeknown to the *Janjawid*, the Tubianas and I had published translations of the documents in R.S. O'Fahey &

M.I. Abu Salim, eds., *Land in Dar Fur. Charters and Related Documents from the Dar Fur Sultanate*, Cambridge 1983, (repr. 2003), 79-99. The barbarians do not always win.¹³

¹³ I should like also to note the recently published autobiography of Glencairn Balfour Paul, *Bagpipes in Babylon. A Lifetime in the Arab World and Beyond*, London: Tauris 2006. Balfour Paul has had a distinguished career as a British diplomat in the Arab world, but in the early 50s he served in Darfur (pp. 137-51 in the present work) about which he wrote much of great interest. As H.G. Balfour-Paul, he wrote a gem of a pamphlet, *History and Antiquities of Darfur*, Khartoum: Sudan Antiquities Service, Museum Pamphlet no.3, 1955, which in its descriptions and plans of the royal palaces of Darfur has never been surpassed. I suspect that Balfour Paul's memoirs will be the last of their kind. Another important retrospective piece is by my colleague Gunnar Haaland, "The Darfur conflict in evolving politico-economic and socio-cultural contexts", *International Journal of Diversity* 5, 2005.