

The Disaster in Darfur in Historical Perspective

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Article abstract

This article is to demonstrate that the current crisis in Darfur is not a spontaneous insurgency at the beginning of the twenty-first century but the culmination of neglect, religion, and racism since the end of the nineteenth century. Historically, there has been a long record of conflict between the African Fur and Masalit and the Arabs of Darfur, particularly the Baqqara. This racial hostility was compounded by the cultural discrimination between the rustic, illiterate Baqqara Arabs of Darfur, commonly known as the awlad al-gharib (westerners) and the more sophisticated literate riverine Arabs of the towns located in the heartland of the Sudan along the river Nile, the Awlad al-Bahr (people of the river). This juxtaposition of the center versus the periphery is central to any understanding of the history of Sudan of which the disaster in Darfur is the most recent manifestation. Moreover, since 1969 Darfur has been the strategic battleground in the much larger conflict begun by Muammar Qadhafi of Libya in 1969 to establish an Arab, Islamic Sudanic Libyan Empire south of the Sahara. In this 40 years' war the current crisis in Darfur is yet another act in a Shakespearean tragedy about the long road to disaster in Darfur. The theme of the play remains the same, but this act, the most bloody to be sure, must be understood by the international community as another episode in the continuing struggle for control of the most strategic regions of the Chad basin, Darfur.

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by
Robert O. Collins

ABSTRACT

This article is to demonstrate that the current crisis in Darfur is not a spontaneous insurgency at the beginning of the twenty-first century but the culmination of neglect, religion, and racism since the end of the nineteenth century. Historically, there has been a long record of conflict between the African Fur and Masalit and the Arabs of Darfur, particularly the Baqqara. This racial hostility was compounded by the cultural discrimination between the rustic, illiterate Baqqara Arabs of Darfur, commonly known as the awlad al-gharib (westerners) and the more sophisticated literate riverine Arabs of the towns located in the heartland of the Sudan along the river Nile, the Awlad al-Bahr (people of the river). This juxtaposition of the center versus the periphery is central to any understanding of the history of Sudan of which the disaster in Darfur is the most recent manifestation. Moreover, since 1969 Darfur has been the strategic battleground in the much larger conflict begun by Muammar Qadhafi of Libya in 1969 to establish an Arab, Islamic Sudanic Libyan Empire south of the Sahara. In this 40 years' war the current crisis in Darfur is yet another act in a Shakespearean tragedy about the long road to disaster in Darfur. The theme of the play remains the same, but this act, the most bloody to be sure, must be understood by the international community as another episode in the continuing struggle for control of the most strategic regions of the Chad basin, Darfur.

The current crisis in Darfur has generated more commentary, reports, and media coverage than the 50 years of a much bloodier civil war in the southern Sudan which began after the mutiny of the southern Equatorial Corps at Torit in August 1955, six months before independence on 1 January 1956. This first civil war was fought by southern insurgents, known as the Anya-Nya, against the Sudan army until a peace agreement was signed in Addis Ababa in 1972 creating the autonomous Southern Regional Government. Regrettably, this "peace"

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was more an “armistice” than a permanent political solution, for by 1979 President Ja’afar Numaryi, who had signed the Addis Ababa peace agreement, had personally and unilaterally abrogated the agreement arbitrarily dividing the southern regional government into three regions, each directly controlled from Khartoum and no longer by a single autonomous High Executive Council in Juba. Southern resentment smoldered as Numayri, known as the “Master Manipulator,” played off one southern ethnic group against the other by bribery, patronage, and political preferment. Remnants of the Anya-Nya had remained in their sanctuaries in the bush to occasionally sally forth more like bandits than guerrillas.

In May 1983, former senior officers in the Anya-Nya who had been integrated into the Sudan army after 1972 peace agreement staged a mutiny of the 5th Battalion at Bor, Pibor, and Akobo. That launched the second civil war led by Colonel John Garang de Mabior and his Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). This second insurgency was profoundly different from the first. The SPLA was better organized, disciplined, and armed than the Anya-Nya, and by 1987 had taken the offensive against the Sudanese army and its surrogate *murahiliin* militias. The army was fighting with obsolete weapons, hopelessly demoralized, and no longer a fighting force capable of opposing the SPLA. The insurgents now controlled the entire south but the fortified towns and had launched an offensive into southern Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile provinces. Thereafter, the fighting continued in a brutal conflict for another 20 years. When both sides realized that neither could win, they agreed to negotiate.

When a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was at last signed on 9 January 2005, after 20 years of war and four years of intense negotiations, two and a half million southerners had been killed, four million become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and another two million languished in refugee camps across the border. The second civil war had been a human tragedy far beyond the present four years of disaster in Darfur, but since it was fought over 20 years, in a remote region of Africa, not even the fledgling CNN, let alone the mainstream international media, could insert their intrepid reporters. The laptop personal computer, e-mail, and the ubiquitous cell phone were still in their infancy and yet to become the preferred means of communication. Moreover, the southern insurgency was complex, protracted, and with few resources to plead its case to the international community. The world was just not interested in the civil war in the southern Sudan, except for several dozen humanitarian organizations and that strange and unholy alliance in the US Congress of the Israeli Lobby, Black Caucus, and Neo-Christian Right. The southern Sudanese fought on regardless of the world by whom they were forgotten.

In contrast, the crisis in Darfur has become a major industry in the media world. Eric Reeves, one of the most diligent and perceptive commentators on the disaster, has written over a million words. Drones of ‘sunshine jour-

nalists' have dropped in for a weekend in Darfur; others are more diligent and have trekked into the countryside. They all have written a plethora of articles that not only appear in the national and international newspapers and journals that are widely read by those who make policy and their practitioners as front page news or editorials. The written word has been made all the more visible by constant television coverage, the ubiquitous photographer, and the intrusive internet. Moreover, government agencies, like USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and the more than 40 humanitarian agencies working in Darfur, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and *Médicins Sans Frontières*, have produced detailed reliable reports and scores of personal accounts by the victims. All of this massive reporting has generated an equally massive response by the international community, Western governments, and the influential Darfur Coalition in the US consisting of humanitarian and holocaust activists, their organizations, and over 250 Darfur Committees on American college and university campuses. The hostility, sympathy, and frustration generated by the need to end this tragedy in Darfur has led to long and agonizing negotiations in the United Nations to forge a robust peacekeeping force. The International Criminal Court in The Hague is seeking to prosecute those Sudanese officials who have approved, organized, and condoned the killing fields of Darfur that the US has called "genocide." Even those who disagree with the application of that ambiguous appellation cannot deny "ethnic cleansing."

In all of this excellent and perceptive reporting not one of the authors has understood or even troubled to discover the historical imperatives of the conflict, without which their reporting has been seriously compromised if not badly flawed. The result is that they have lost sight of the fundamental fact that the current crisis in Darfur is not some spontaneous eruption against neglect, misgovernment, and racism, but the latest episode, the most violent to be sure, in the 40 years of tragic conflict for control the great basin of Chad, of which Darfur is an integral part. The disaster in Darfur is another act in a Shakespearean tragedy. The theme of the play remains, but this act now presents to the audience the conflict for control of the most strategic regions of the Chad basin, Darfur.

Regrettably, our intrepid reporters have also ignored several fundamental facts of geography and history that provide the sets for this theater of tragedy. Although virtually every reporter comments on the geographical isolation of Darfur, few appear to have understood its wider geographical setting. Darfur, in fact, is the eastern region of the great basin of Lake Chad and is not part of the larger basin of the Nile valley. The Sudanic plain of Darfur tilts gently to the west but is broken by the Jabal Marra massif, which rises nearly 10,000 feet above the plain and the ancestral home of the Fur. Geographically, Darfur belongs to Chad, and in the past its inhabitants were more closely associated with their kinsmen in the west than with riverine Arabs far away to the east in the Nile valley.

This westward geographical orientation has shaped the pre-colonial history of Darfur. Darfur means "Land of the Fur," and Turra in northern Jabal Marra is still venerated as their ancestral home. Sulayman Solong founded the Keira dynasty about 1640 and transformed the Fur tribal kingdom into a multi-ethnic sultanate ruled by the Fur Keira dynasty. In the traditions, he was a mighty warrior who carved out an empire to the west, north, and south. His expansion westward provoked the Sultan of Wadai who, like Sulayman, had forged a plethora of petty chieftaincies into a powerful state. He refused to pay tribute to Sulayman as his sovereign only to be defeated by Sulayman's Fur army. His victory, however, was only the first of numerous wars between Darfur and Wadai in the eighteenth century for control of the borderlands. When the Keira sultans were strong they conquered Wadai; when weak they retired into the defensive fortress of Jabal Marra. His successors ruled as divine kings over a Fur state administered by Fur officials which embraced an increasing number of different ethnic groups administered through their traditional authorities. During the eighteenth century the Fur sultans sought to extend the kingdom to the north and west. In the north the Zaghawa, after stiff resistance, submitted.

After a dynastic succession struggle during in the late 1750s Muhammad Tayrab ibn Ahmad Bukr (1752-87) emerged as the new sultan who subdued the powerful nobility, centralized the state, and made peace with Wadai which lasted, except for the usual border skirmishes, for another century. Sultan Tayrab, the greatest of the Keira sultans, inherited a multi-ethnic state in which the Fur played a less dominant role, having to share the powerful offices of state with non-Fur. Tayrab also moved his *fashirs* (royal encampments) down onto the plains east of the mountain massif, which reoriented the center of government eastward toward Kordofan. Once settled on the eastern plain the Fur sultans were continuously threatened by the Musabba'at, who had been driven from Jabal Marra into Kordofan by Sulayman. Thereafter, they worked assiduously to overthrow the Keira dynasty. When the Musabba'at ruler, Hashim ibn 'Isawi, assembled a large mercenary army in 1782 to invade Darfur, Tayrab and the Fur host crushed Hashim and his army and occupied Kordofan under Keira rule for another 40 years.

Another succession struggle followed the death of Sultan Tayrab and in about 1792 'Abd al-Rahman was accepted as sultan by the Keira nobility and army. He died 10 years later, but not before centralizing the kingdom with a permanent capital at El Fasher northeast of Jabal Marra. Over the next 75 years, the warrior sultans were replaced by a succession of weak sultans, palace intrigue, and the growth of Islam. The invasion of Kordofan by Sultan Tayrab had opened Darfur to wandering, *fuqara'* (Muslim holy men) from the Nile valley. They were a diverse group composed of a few learned *ulama* and a larger number of simple semi-literate *fuqara'* who were more rainmakers and spiritualists than holy men. They would settle, intermarry, and become integrated members of the village community. The sultans encouraged *fuqara'* immigration by issuing

charters for land grants, exempting them from customary taxes and military service, and by building mosques, particularly around El Fasher. In return, the *fugara*' were expected to use their writing and diplomatic skills on behalf of the sultan. Over time this created a new cadre of loyal bureaucrats free from clan and tribal obligations.

The Islamization of Darfur was slow and sporadic, and differed significantly from the Arab/Islamic culture of the Nile valley. The acceptance of Islam and Arabic at court made little impression on the rural Fur and its impact was directly proportionate to their distance from the capital. Islamic ritual and Arab practices adopted by the western Fur were very different from those adopted by the Darfuri east of Jabal Marra that has marked the divide between Arabization and Islamicization in Darfur. By the end of the twentieth century the Nilo-Saharan languages of the Darfuri living on the eastern plains had largely been supplanted by Arabic. But, west of Jabal Marra, Fur and the other Nilo-Saharan languages continue to predominate. Similarly, the people of Darfur have never been acculturated into the orthodox Islam of the *Awlad al-Bahr* (people of the river), who dominate the Nile valley, preferring to mix their African rituals into a more syncretistic Islam. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that the conversion of Darfuri syncretistic Islam to a Salafist fundamental interpretation of orthodox Islam began in earnest during the Islamist regime of 'Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir.

When the powerful viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha, invaded the Sudan in search of slaves for his army, gold for his treasury, and a Nilotic empire for Egypt, he sent a Turco-Egyptian expeditionary force into Kordofan where it destroyed the Fur army forces at Bara in August 1821. Darfur was spared for another 50 years, however, by the sudden recall of Turco-Egyptian forces to crush a revolt in the Nile valley by the riverine Arabs. Thereafter, the Keira sultans sought to defend their patrimony in Darfur from an invasion by the resurgent power of Wadai. After nearly a century of amicable relations, Sultan Sabun of Wadai had absorbed into his kingdom by conquest and diplomacy the petty frontier sultanates of Dar Tima, Dar Sila, and Dar Qimr, which hitherto had recognized the suzerainty of the Keira sultans. Upon his death Sabun Muhammad al-Sharif succeeded him. Thereafter, he and his successors dominated the western marches of Darfur, for the once great host of the Fur army had been reduced to some 3,000 cavalry, and another 70,000 infantry, tribal levies prepared to fight with only bows and arrows, spears, and a few antique firearms.

In 1856, al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur, a trader from Khartoum, arrived in the Bahr al-Ghazal and within 10 years had built a sprawling empire with scattered trading stations from which his *bazinqir* (armed slave troops of individual traders) sallied forth to capture slaves sent down the White Nile to the slave markets of Khartoum, Cairo, and Arabia. In the 1860s, the vast and very profitable trading empire of this freebooter and commercial entrepreneur was challenged

by the imperial ambitions of the Khedive Isma'il Pasha of Egypt, who sought to build a greater Egyptian empire extending to the great lakes of equatorial Africa. Isma'il prohibited Zubayr from sending his slaves and ivory down the White Nile, forcing him to establish overland routes through Darfur. At the same time, the khedive was determined to complete the work of his grandfather, Muhammad 'Ali, and the race was on to conquer Darfur. Zubayr won. In 1874, at the Battle of al-Manawashi his *bazinqir*, armed with Remington repeating rifles, decimated the Fur army killing the sultan Ibrahim Muhammad al-Husayn and occupying not just the Fur heartland but the surrounding sultanates in the west — Dars Masalit, Tima, Qimr, and Sila — and terminated the first Keira sultanate. The Fur had to wait another 24 years for its restoration.

Although the later years of the Keira sultanate had been more concerned about events in Kordofan than in Wadai, Darfur's connection to West Africa had been preserved by the transit of thousands of pilgrims and traders making their way to the east on the great *tariq sudan* (the Sudan Road). Beginning on the upper Senegal River this caravan route made its way to the Niger River and then downriver east and south along the great arc of the Niger. Turning east again it led to Lake Chad, Abeche (the capital of Wadai), El Fasher, and on to Sennar on the Blue Nile. Eventually, of course, it crossed the Red Sea to reach the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Although much has been written about the trans-Saharan trade, little is known about the very vigorous east-west trade route along the *tariq sudan*. The number of pilgrims and the amount of trade steadily increased from the seventeenth century after the sultanates of Wadai and Darfur provided the necessary security to promote both trade and safe passage for pilgrims. Many of these pilgrims never reached Arabia, having to settle in Darfur where they and their descendants assimilated with the local ethnic groups. Moreover, numerous *fugara'* from West Africa settled in Darfur either before or after completion of the *hajj*. Although this highway of cultural, commercial, and religious interchange between the Western Sudan and Darfur has declined with the advent of modern means of transportation and communication, it has not been forgotten by traditional societies in Darfur.

The short decade (1874-83) of Turco-Egyptian rule in Darfur initiated by Zubayr was ephemeral. The army of the Khedive Isma'il occupied the major towns, but its officials had little or no administrative control in the countryside when the religious rebellion of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi swept through the Sudan. The Baqqara Arabs of Darfur and Kordofan rushed to become loyal Ansar soldiers of the Mahdi and soon became the shock troops of the Mahdist army during its *jihad* against the hated "Turks." After the Mahdists had annihilated the 10,000-strong Turco-Egyptian army at the Battle of Shaykan in Kordofan on 5 November 1884, Darfur was lost and its governor, Rudolf von Slatin Pasha, an Austrian adventurer in the service of the Turco-Egyptian government, surrendered. Khartoum subsequently fell on 18 February 1885, but the Mahdi himself, in the full flush of his great victory, suddenly died four months

later on 22 June 1885. He was succeeded by the ‘Abdallahi Muhammad Turshain, the commander of the powerful Baqqara Black Flag Division and second in the hierarchy of the Mahdist state,

The elevation of ‘Abdallahi, a Ta’a’isha Baqqara from southern Darfur, as Khalifat al-Mahdi exposed the deep underlying tensions among Sudanese in different parts of the country. The result was a series of brief and largely inconclusive campaigns over the next 15 years (1886-1900). These achieved little more than to transform tension between the Sudanese of the center — *Awlad al-Bahr* (those settled along the Nile) — and those of the periphery, including Darfur, into implacable hostility. The Khalifa proved incapable of ruling Sudan except by force, supported by reluctant Baqqara who would have preferred to remain in Darfur. He also had no means to prevent or offset the devastation wreaked on Sudanese society by successive droughts, famines, and epidemics. While Fur separatism festered in the West, the settling of Ta’a’ishi Baqqara in Omdurman, where they received preferential treatment from the Khalifa, only fuelled further resentment and outright rebellion among the riverine clans, who regarded the Baqqara as vulgar rustics. The repression of the riverine clans secured the dominance of the Ta’a’ishi autocracy, but at a price; the repression became enshrined in Sudanese folklore that resonates down to the present.

The third episode in the struggle between the Sudanese of the center and those of the periphery was a tragic incident that occurred at the close of the Mahdiya era. When General H. H. Kitchener, *Sirdar* (commander-in-chief) of the Egyptian army, launched the Anglo-Egyptian invasion of the Sudan in January 1897 by the construction of a military railway across the Nubian Desert to transport large numbers of troops and equipment, the Khalifa had been taken completely by surprise. He responded by commanding Mahmud Ahmad to bring the great army of the west to Omdurman which took months and whose march was reminiscent of the rapacious passage of the Baqqara from Darfur in 1888. Mahmud was given full command in the north with his headquarters at Metemma, the tribal capital of the Ja’aliyyin, who had no love for the suspicious Khalifa ‘Abdallahi. When Mahmud ordered the Ja’aliyyin to leave Metemma and relocate on the east bank of the Nile to accommodate him and his army, they decided to resist. On 1 July 1897 Mahmud’s army launched their assault against the defiant Ja’aliyyin in Metemma, and despite a courageous defense they were savagely slaughtered, sealing in blood the hatred of the *Awlad al-Bahr* for the Ta’a’ishi. A hundred years later the memory of that massacre has not been forgotten.

After the defeat of the Khalifa ‘Abdallahi and his army outside Omdurman by the Anglo-Egyptian forces on 2 September 1898, the Mahdist state collapsed, and the titular Fur Sultan of Darfur, ‘Ali Dinar Zakariya Muhammad al-Fadl, who had been confined in Omdurman and watched by the Khalifa’s agents, gathered together a few followers and headed west to regain his throne. He captured

El Fasher, defeated a rival claimant to the sultanate, and seized the throne. In 1900, in return for a nominal symbolic tribute, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan government, which was effectively British, officially recognized him as the sovereign of the independent Fur sultanate of Darfur. He organized his satrapy in an efficient if barbarous manner and crushed all opposition, particularly the Rizayqat Baqqara. While the Mahdiya had sealed in blood the animosity between westerners and the riverine Sudanese, the sultanate of 'Ali Dinar forged the historic, smoldering ethnic hostility between the Arab Rizayqat and the African Fur. The Rizayqat are the largest and most formidable of all the Baqqara of Darfur, with a long history of resistance against the Fur sultans. They, in turn, never had been able to establish satisfactory relations with the Rizayqat, despite the fact that they had common interests in acquiring pagan African slaves and the Fur raiding parties had to pass through Baqqara territory on their way south to the slaving grounds.

Having established his authority at El Fasher, 'Ali Dinar next turned to suppress the Rizayqat who refused to pay him tribute in ivory, but his 1901 campaign was indecisive. Later, preoccupied with incursions by the French on his western frontier, 'Ali Dinar was unable to return to his old feud with Shaykh Musa Maddibu, the able leader of the southern Rizayqat until 1913. 'Ali Dinar demanded he pay his annual tribute, acknowledge him as suzerain, and surrender Darfuri dissidents who had taken refuge in Dar Rizayqat. When Musa refused, 'Ali Dinar was determined to destroy the Rizayqat. During October 1913, the Fur army of some 6,000 men advanced into Dar Rizayqat, burning and looting until confronted by the Rizayqat army at Tumburko. Here the two armies fought for five days with, for African warfare, very heavy losses. But on 1 November the Fur retreated, pursued by the victorious Rizayqat and remembered vividly today in their folklore. Under implacable pressure from Sir Slatin Pasha, the former governor of Darfur in the Turkiya and the powerful inspector-general of the Condominium government in the Sudan, *shaykh* Madibbu, had little choice but to submit to the authority of 'Ali Dinar as sultan of all Darfur. Dar Rizayqat had been ravaged and only saved from total extinction by the unexpected victory at Tumburko, and he needed a friendly and powerful ally in Khartoum to insure his authority as *shaykh* and the integrity of the Rizayqat Baqqara.

After the outbreak of the First World War the British rulers in Khartoum began to have second thoughts about 'Ali Dinar. The Sudan government had been no help in 'Ali Dinar's efforts to stem the French advance into his tributary states on the western frontier. In 1909, the French had conquered Wadai and in 1911 part of Dar Masalit, and after the Anglo-French alliance had been made public at the beginning of the war, 'Ali Dinar became increasingly truculent toward the Sudan government whose British rulers were now the allies of his French enemies. When the Caliph of Islam and his Ottoman empire joined the war on the side of Germany and the Christian British deposed the Turkish khe-

dive in Egypt, his ill-temper turned to open belligerence. ‘Ali Dinar openly joined the *jihād* against the European *kāfirin*. In 1916, he sent large reinforcements to his border posts on the Kordofan frontier, which provided the British with the necessary pretext for an inevitable war. An Anglo-Egyptian flying column of 2,500 men defeated the Fur army and went on to capture El Fasher on 23 May 1916 and occupy his sumptuous palace. Five months later “Huddleston’s Horse” surprised and killed ‘Ali Dinar in his camp at Giubu. A boundary agreement was concluded with the French in 1919 whereby Dar Masalit remained part of Darfur, but the border sultanates of Dar Tama, Dar Sila, and Dar Qimr became part of French Equatorial Africa.

The British rulers would have been quite content to have left ‘Ali Dinar alone to rule his remote and isolated sultanate so long as he paid his symbolic tribute and maintained the peace at no expense to the Sudan government. His capital, El Fasher, was 750 miles of trackless sand dunes, scrub, baobab, and acacia trees from Khartoum, and Geneina, a frontier market town on the old *tariq sudan* west of Jabal Marra, was another 240 treacherous miles from El Fasher. Having conquered this vast unwanted addition to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, British administrative policy throughout the Condominium was one of benign neglect: to keep the peace in Darfur at minimal cost and spend not a piastre more. So long as the Fur kept the peace, a handful of British political officers simply recognized the traditional tribal authorities. Called native administration, known quaintly as Indirect Rule, Darfur was left in the hands of the local *shaykhs*, *nazirs*, *maks*, and *shartais* so long as they behaved themselves, settled intertribal disputes, and maintained a semblance of law and order. There was no obtrusive taxation, only a symbolic tribute. Egyptian administrative officials, whom the British regarded as troublemakers, were purposely excluded. Inspired by the preaching of the Mahdi the Baqqara of Darfur had become his faithful Ansar who had provided the elite troops for the Khalifa’s army. In defeat they had returned to Darfur where Mahdism became deeply rooted during the Condominium. Islamic fanaticism was endemic, but outbreaks by exuberant Ansar were at first small, isolated, and easily contained until the uprising at Nyala in September 1921. Some 6,000 Ansar led by a Masalit *faqih* nearly captured Nyala post, killing two British officers and 41 soldiers before being forced to retreat having lost some 600 dead. Peace in southern Darfur was not fully restored and the spread of Mahdism contained until the end of the year when a powerful government patrol inflicted heavy losses on the Baqqara.

The greatest problem of native administration was its failure to accommodate any form of modernization. By 1935, Darfur had one elementary school and two sub-grade “literary schools.” The total budget for education was only £E1,200 a year for a school-age population of 500,000. The director of education’s request for £E55 to introduce “some education” was rejected. Among many British officials there was great fear of the “half-educated man,” those with

a smattering of education who became a detribalized, discontented class of semi-literate troublemakers. Consequently, in Darfur the government-sponsored schools, to teach literacy were gradually replaced by *khalwas*, where the curriculum consisted of the rote-learning of the *Qur'an* under the instruction of a semi-literate *faqih*. All the few available places in the remaining government schools were reserved for the sons of *shaykhs*, *nazirs*, and chiefs who would inherit the tribal administration of their fathers. In June 1938, the British governor of Darfur could boast: "We. . . have been able to limit education to the sons of Chiefs and native administration personnel and can confidently look forward to keeping the ruling classes at the top of the elementary tree for many ears to come." Public health, like education, was also limited by benign neglect. Darfur was the only province in the Sudan without the popular maternity clinics. Epidemics were endemic, disease often carried by the pilgrims from West Africa; smallpox, cerebrospinal meningitis, relapsing fever, and leishmaniasis were common.

When the British departed from the Sudan at independence in 1956 they left behind in Darfur a record of conspicuous disinterest and appalling neglect. Not one new boys' school had been opened since 1932. Until 1947, there were no provincial judges or educational officers, and never a provincial agriculturist, who were common elsewhere throughout the Sudan. Native administration was gradually being strangled by aging, incompetent, and often drunk traditional leaders concerned more with their own personal self-interest than with that of their subjects. During the 40 years of British rule in Darfur, at no single time were there never more than a dozen British political officers to oversee the administration of the traditional leaders in a region the size of France. This dismal heritage became all the more tragic after the ascendancy of the *Awlad al-Bahr* in Khartoum, and the fantasies and visions of Muammar Qadhafi to carve a great Libyan Sudanic empire south of the Sahara, in which Darfur was to be an integral part. Surrounded by his oil wealth in Tripoli perhaps Qadhafi's plans for Darfur were not so far-fetched. During the last 200 years no government, Turk, Mahdist, British, and most certainly not Sudanese, has ever made any pretense of governing Darfur, the administration of which was either ephemeral or an illusion in the hands of the traditional *shaykhs* and *shartais*.

On 1 September 1969, three months after Colonel Ja'afar Numayri had seized the government of Sudan, Colonel Muammar Qadhafi engineered a military coup d'état to depose King Idris of Libya. Qadhafi proclaimed himself a reformer for "Libya, Arabism, and Islam" in the progressive path of "Freedom, Socialism, Unity" of the Free Officer Movement of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser. He was obsessed by geopolitics and dreamed of a Greater Arab Libyan "Islamic State of the Sahara." He first sought, however, to unify Libya, Egypt, and the Sudan into a single state with his "Tripoli Charter." But he was rebuffed by both presidents Sadat and Numayri, despite the fact he had rushed to Numayri's assistance when Sudan was threatened by a communist coup in July 1971. He never

forgave Numayri for this humiliating rejection, and thereafter directed his energies and great wealth to building an Arab Libyan/Sudanic empire, in which Darfur would play a strategic role.

Qadhafi became the patron of the Front de Libération Nationale du Tchad (FROLINAT) and the host for Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the opposition Umma (Mahdist) Party in the Sudan, the *imam* of the Baqqara Ansar of Darfur, and the leader of the National Front in exile in Tripoli determined to overthrow Ja'afar Numayri. Qadhafi was further infuriated with Numayri when he granted the African southern Sudanese autonomy in 1972. The Libyan leader then began to supply arms and training in two camps in southern Libya, eventually training over 2,000 of Sadiq's Baqqara Ansar from Darfur, and units from Qadhafi's mercenary Islamic Legion. Just before dawn on Thursday, 2 July 1976, all the Sudanese cabinet ministers and senior government officials were gathered at the airport to welcome the return of President Numayri from a visit to the United States and France. After the customary greetings the airport and the capital suddenly came under a fierce attack. Numayri was immediately whisked into hiding; General Baghir, vice-president and commander-in-chief of the army, rushed to the presidential palace to organize resistance. The Battle for Khartoum raged for the next two days, during which the defenders were at first outnumbered and outgunned in the fierce firefights until reinforcements arrived to turn the tide and end the failed coup. Those insurgents who fled were pursued and killed in the desert. The attempted coup d'état had long been planned in Tripoli, with the connivance of Ethiopia and the Soviet Union, both of whom were hostile to Numayri. The actual planning was left to Sadiq al-Mahdi, who in a broadcast had claimed victory when half-way to Khartoum. But he hastily returned to Tripoli and exile after learning of the defeat of his strike force.

Thereafter, Qadhafi concentrated his energies on building his presence in Darfur. The *Forces Armées du Nord* (FAN) of Hissène Habré controlled most of western Darfur where he and some 10,000 rebels had sought safe-haven after their defeat in 1980 by the Chad National Army. Northern and central Darfur were now awash in automatic weapons, which had been distributed to Sadiq's followers. This precipitated a plethora of raids and counter-raids between African Fur farmers and Arab Rizayqat, which the Sudan government forces were powerless to prevent. During the following year the United States continued its weapons shipments to Numayri, in the naive expectation he would somehow contain the 5,000-man Islamic Legion (backed by the Libyan army) which now controlled all of Darfur north of Kutum, the administrative center of northern Darfur.

After the overthrow of Numayri in April 1985 the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which was a one year interim government before elections, restored friendly relations with Qadhafi in return for oil. A Libyan-Sudanese commission was promptly established to explore closer ties between Khartoum

and Tripoli. The TMC, however, refused Qadhafi's demands to give his Islamic Legion a free hand in Darfur, but did not object when some 200 Libyan agents established a very active and visible presence in the capital. After the elections in April 1986 and the formation by Sadiq of a coalition government, he sought to transform his warm relationship with his patron into something more tangible. He gave his blessing for Qadhafi's Islamic Legion to open a new road from the Kufra Oasis to Kutum, over which 400 Libyan trucks carrying weapons, supplies, and Libyan troops arrived to take control of Kutum. Islamic Legionnaires now operated openly in the towns of northern and central Darfur recruiting hundreds of Baqqara, mostly Rizayqat, who paraded through the streets in Libyan dress with the assistance of a helpless Sudanese army. Other Libyan units occupied Tinné, a strategic border town north of Geneina.

During 1987, the Islamic Legion continued to actively recruit in Darfur and launched an offensive into Chad. Hassène Habré, now president of Chad, mobilized his old FAN, re-equipped by the French and re-named the *Forces Armées Nationales Tchadiennes* (FANT), to defend the country. In two big battles in Wadai the Islamic Legion was severely defeated by the FANT with the assistance of French Jaguar jets. By April 1987, the FANT had driven the Islamic Legionnaires back through northern Darfur to Kutum and advanced another 100 miles to the Wadi Huwar until their ammunition and supplies were exhausted forcing them to return to Chad. During the ensuing months the Islamic Legion, now joined by Acheikh ibn Oumar's Vulcan Force, were re-supplied and re-equipped by Qadhafi to counter-attack across the border north of Adre in November 1987, with the blessing of Sadiq al-Mahdi. During these same months Hasan al-Turabi, whose National Islamic Front Party (NIF) had won 51 seats in the 1986 elections, began to organize the Baqqara Arabs into a "Human Belt" of Arab Islamists across southern Kordofan and Darfur. That was shortly followed by a more ominous development: the emergence from the shadows of the mysterious 'Arab Gathering.'

The 'Arab Gathering' was an amorphous collection of Arab supremacists in Darfur to whom Qadhafi provided money, weapons, and military training at the Kufra Oasis. They sought to establish a triangular Arab state from Tripoli to N'Djamena and Khartoum. Although the 'Gathering' was highly secretive, during the 1980s they had surreptitiously distributed anonymous leaflets in Darfur denouncing the rule of the *zurug* (Ar. darkness; pl., *zurga*), a pejorative term in Darfur meaning Black Africans. On 5 October 1987, the 'Arab Gathering' came out of the closet by publishing in *Al-Ayam* an open letter to Sadiq al-Mahdi signed by 23 prominent Darfuri Arabs, asserting the claims of the Arab supremacists and threatening a "catastrophe" if "the neglect of the Arab race continues." In their later publications they were less circumspect, bluntly asserting that they intended "to kill all *zurqa*, Darfur is now Dar al-Arab."

Three months later on 1 January 1988 President Habré of Chad devoted

most of his New Year message to denouncing Qadhafi's control of northern and western Darfur. Achiekh's Vulcan Force had relocated to Geneina and a steady flow of Libyan arms from the Aozou Strip poured into central Darfur and as far south as Dar Fartit in the western Bahr al-Ghazal. The Arab Gourane in central Darfur and the southern Rizayqat Baqqara were now the recipients of a steady supply of Libyan weapons. In order to defend themselves from the Arab Libyan/Baqqara threat, the Fur immediately established their own "Federal Army of Darfur," consisting of some 6,000 *jakab* (struggle) Fur fighters armed with automatic weapons from Chad. In response Musa Madibbu, *shaykh* of the Rizayqat, appealed to Sadiq for more arms to supplement those coming from Libya, and they were swiftly provided. In autumn 1988, the long-standing feud between the Fur and Rizayqat erupted into the "War of the Tribes." The Fur Federal Army was crushed and the survivors slaughtered in what *Al-Ayam* described as "genocide." Governance from Khartoum had all but vanished from Darfur and the War of the Tribes remained completely unnoticed by the international media.

The very visible military presence of Libyans in Darfur compounded by the Sudanese government's continuous denial of any presence and the collapse of the Fur, whom the government could not or did not wish to protect, caused considerable embarrassment in Khartoum. When that transparent prevarication could no longer be sustained, Sadiq lamely requested Qadhafi to withdraw his troops. Qadhafi refused, calling in his markers accumulated during his support for Sadiq since the 1970s, knowing that Sadiq did not have the resources to expel his Islamic Legion, Libyan troops, or the Vulcan Force. Throughout 1988-89, Darfur remained a battleground in the 30 years war between Libya and Chad for control of the Chad basin. The administrative authority of Sadiq's government in Darfur had virtually disappeared throughout the northern, western, and much of the central regions. The Constituent Assembly repeatedly demanded the borders with Libya and Chad be sealed, but the government was powerless to close its frontier when it did not control it. Libyan delegations continued to arrive in Khartoum always pressing for a Libya-Sudan union, but Sadiq had become indecisive, using the excuse of Egyptian, Saudi, and US opposition to any such Arab alliance.

On 1 April 1989, Idriss Déby Itno, commander-in-chief of FANT, tried to overthrow Habré. Following the shoot-out at the palace between Déby's forces and Habré's Palace Guard, Déby and his rebel troops were forced to flee for safety to Darfur, where they were joined by other FANT units from the Niger frontier, central Chad, and 2,000 defecting troops from the capital. Sadiq personally flew to El Fasher to support Déby, and flew him to Tripoli where Qadhafi provided an unlimited amount of cash and ordered Déby to reorganize his troops. These now included the Islamic Legion and a host of unsavory mercenaries from Chad, mostly Zaghawa, and northern Arabs from Darfur, including Rizayqat, who flocked to Déby, having been bought by Qadhafi's paymaster, Hassan Fadl.

Déby settled in western Darfur to rebuild his insurgency known as “1 April Movement” or, more pretentiously, the *Movement Patriotique du Salut* (Patriotic Salvation Movement, MPS). During the subsequent, most dismal months of Sadiq’s rule the opposition in the Constituent Assembly vehemently criticized him for the failure of his government to defend Darfur, sarcastically announcing that he had created an “Independent Republic of the Darfur.”

When the presence of the Sudanese government had all but vanished, the last semblance of law and order also disappeared in the spring of 1989 to be replaced by inter-tribal warfare. In May, 3,000 Fur were murdered near Nyala; another 1,500 Fur were killed by the Bani Halba and Salamat Arab militias around Jabal Marra. Fur and Baqqara supported by Islamic Legionnaires fought a two-day battle with heavy Fur losses from the superior firepower of the Baqqara’s Libyan weapons. In April, Qadhafi sent Sadiq another \$4 million “to prepare for the invasion of Chad,” and rebuilt the strategic Sudan army base at Saq al-Na’am in northern Darfur for the Islamic Legion. By May, the fighting had spread from Jabal Marra into the southwest border region with Chad where Libyan arms were distributed to hundreds of refugees from Chad to settle old scores with the Fur. After a week of fighting with losses on both sides the exhausted combatants agreed to the historic institution of a *ajawweed/muatamarat al-sulh*: the traditional conference by which disputes had been resolved in the past and whose decisions were considered immutable. However, the Baqqara chiefs boycotted the conference. No other gesture could have been a greater insult. No other symbol could have conveyed the arrogance of those convinced of their superiority by the power of their weaponry over the Fur, whom they regarded as defeated. From the Baqqara perspective, therefore, any negotiations were irrelevant, for the dispute had been settled by force of arms in their favor. It was not, however, settled. Fighting between Baqqara and Fur immediately resumed with uncontrolled ferocity, and several hundred Baqqara and Fur were killed in a fierce firefight on 22 June 1989. Over 50,000 Fur sought refuge in Nyala. The hapless Sudanese officials were powerless to halt the fighting, but the Sudanese governor in El Fasher defiantly declared he would consider an invasion from Chad a “hostile act.” In late June 1989, Habrè’s FANT crossed the border to cut a 100-mile swath of destruction through western Darfur before retiring to Wadai.

On 30 June 1989, Brigadier ‘Umar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir overthrew Sadiq’s impotent government and established an Islamist Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) to fulfill the pan-Arab Islamist agenda of the National Islamic Front. He immediately turned to Qadhafi who, at last, hoped to see the fulfilment of his vision of a pan-Arab union of Libya and the Sudan; a Libyan-Sudan Joint Ministerial Committee was formed to negotiate the terms. Members of the RCC subsequently shuttled between Khartoum and Tripoli, returning with arms, oil, and their official acceptance of a Libyan presence in Darfur. Brigadier al-Tijani al-Tahir, a devout Muslim born near Kutum and regular guest at the

Libyan embassy in Khartoum, was appointed “political supervisor” for Darfur. Although he was actually a Fur, he was not inclined to prefer his kinfolk in favor of his own personal interests. A regular commuter to Tripoli, he signed a very favorable treaty, originally proposed by Sadiq a-Mahdi in 1988, that gave Qadhafi and his Islamic Legion a preferred status in Darfur. Neither al-Tahir, who passionately hated Habrè’s tribal forces, nor his colleagues on the RCC, had any intention of reducing their support for Qadhafi in Darfur. Instead, they prepared to re-establish the historic Islamic Arab traditions of those who had ruled the *bilad al-sudan* (Land of the Blacks) for centuries.

On 16 October 1990, Habré once more launched a massive offensive across the border to drive Qadhafi and his Islamic Legion from Darfur once and for all. Operation REZZOU cut another swath of destruction 120 miles to Kutum and a final confrontation with the MPS and Qadhafi’s Islamic Legion. Very heavy fighting swirled around Kutum for a week destroying hundreds of villages with many civilian casualties and very heavy losses for both the FANT and MPS, but especially the Islamic Legion, which was forced to retire with their wounded from Darfur to Libyan bases. Having exhausted their ammunition and supplies, the FANT returned once more into Wadai, but the defeat of the MPS and Islamic Legion had brought Qadhafi and the RCC closer together. In November, Qadhafi offered to pave the old caravan route from Kufra to El Fasher to create an all-weather road that would bind Darfur more closely to Tripoli than to Khartoum, a project for which Brigadier al-Tahir, Libya’s man in Darfur, proved to be an accommodating and enthusiastic advocate. In return, Bashir promised an “integrated region” consisting of Darfur in the Sudan and Kufra in Libya and blandly signed the Libya-Sudan Integration Charter of April 1990. On paper at least Muammar Qadhafi had achieved his 20-year dream of a Libya-Sudan union first envisaged by his 1969 Tripoli Charter. Bashir needed Libyan cash, resources, and arms to bring the civil war in the south to a successful conclusion. There also remained the ancient and troublesome Ansar in Darfur loyal to Sadiq al-Mahdi who needed to be contained. In fact, the west had long been a volatile frontier that no government of the independent Sudan had ever fully controlled. The recognition of Libyan influence in Darfur was the price Bashir was prepared to pay so long as the pact of unity produced Libyan oil to fuel the Sudanese economy and Libyan arms to resurrect the famed “fighting Sudanese” of the past that had degenerated under Numaryi into a “rabble in arms.”

On the very same day in April 1990 that the Libya-Sudan Integration Charter was published in the Khartoum newspapers, Idriss Déby launched his reorganized and rearmed MPS across the frontier into Chad, shielded by a huge sandstorm. They overwhelmed the FANT border posts, inflicting heavy casualties and taking 1,000 prisoners. On 7 April, Habré ordered a counter-attack on a 100-mile front, but Déby, given advance warning from Bashir, withdrew deep into the interior, and the FANT once again occupied most of western Darfur, burning villages from which hundreds fled seeking refuge elsewhere. Qadhafi

rushed reinforcements from Kufra accompanied by Libyan jet fighter-bombers. Arabs from Zalengei took advantage of the FANT invasion to resume their “long-standing feud” with the Fur, in which several Arabs were killed. This provided Bashir with a pretext to have non-Arab dissidents, including over 100 Fur leaders, arrested and imprisoned in the execrable Shalla Prison south of El Fasher. In June, another 30 “prominent” Fur were arrested and there were reports of Sudanese government troops intervening to assist the Baqqa militia. In Darfur ‘Ali Shimal, a prominent member of NIF and a committed Muslim Brother with ties to the Arab Gathering, founded a People’s Defence Force from which the Fur were purposely excluded.

Once again rearmed and reorganized Idriss Déby, more determined than ever, once more invaded Chad and this time overthrew Habré in November 1990. The Chadians and the French had lost all confidence in Habré, who became notorious for his flagrant violation of human rights. His army was weary of war, short of ammunition, and equipment, and when the French refused any further military support, Habré was doomed. In early November, 2,000 of Déby’s MPS crossed the border on a broad front and after a week of fierce fighting the FANT front collapsed and the MPS swept through Chad in their “tacticals” — Toyota pick-up trucks with mounted machine guns and cannon. On 2 December 1990, Déby entered N’Djamena as Habré fled into exile.

The victors of these long years of fighting in, over, and for Darfur, ironically, were the riverine Sudanese Arabs, the *Awlad al-Bahr*, who cared little — intellectually, socially, or economically — for those rustic hicks, the *awlad al-gharib* (westerners). Their contempt was confirmed by the country folk’s enthusiasm for Sufism — Islamic mysticism. The Muslims of Darfur had been prepared to die for the reformer of the Faith, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, whose teaching had now become anathema to the new Islamists who had placed his great grandson and *imam* of the Darfur and Kordofan Ansar and political leader of Umma opposition under house arrest. The non-Arab Muslims of Darfur, as in the past, were convinced they had been betrayed by the riverine Arabs in Khartoum. In the dying decade of the twentieth century, agents of either Mediterranean or Nile imperialism were represented by surrogates, suspect at best, distrusted at worst.

After the departure of Déby and his MPS from Darfur the Islamist junta in Khartoum, like Numayri in 1983-84, had failed to respond to the famine of 1990-91. By 1991, the shortage of food in western Darfur had driven thousands of refugees into Wadai seeking food; many who remained quietly perished. But either the RCC expressed little interest in the suffering of the westerners, or the Sudanese Islamist Arab officials from Khartoum, who were slowly returning to fill the vacuum left by the MPS, simply ignored the plight of the Darfuri Arab and non-Arab alike as the death toll mounted. Moreover, by the mid-1990s Muammar Qadhafi had become a middle-aged Nasserite, who represented a

threadbare political ideology unredeemed by a religious theology acceptable to either Sunni or Sufi. He had never been a *talibe* (student) of the nineteenth-century Islamic reformers or of the Grand Sanussi of Libya whose followers he had ruthlessly suppressed. Unlike Hasan al-Turabi, the patron of the Islamist revolution in the Sudan, he was unprepared or unable to play any significant intellectual or political role in shaping the destiny of Islam at the end of the twentieth century. When he warned Bashir in January 1991 that his Islamist advisers, led by Turabi, were taking the Sudan down a dark and dangerous path in Darfur, he was politely ignored.

Qadhafi was growing old, was tired of war, and increasingly alarmed by the arrival of radical Afghan-Arab *mujahidiin* seeking sanctuary in the Sudan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Afghan-Arabs, including Osama bin Laden, had been warmly welcomed by the Islamists and Hasan al-Turabi, who had held the first Popular Arab and Islamic Conference (PAIC) in April 1991 attended by the leaders of every Islamist terrorist organization worldwide. The RCC and NIF were energetically building an Islamic theocratic state in Khartoum and placed the Afghan-Arabs in *mujahidiin* terrorist training camps in the desert surrounding Khartoum to prepare for the destabilization of secular Arab governments, particularly in Algeria and Tunisia, and replace them with an Islamist state. Qadhafi responded by launching a ruthless persecution of Islamic fundamentalists in Libya. Once Déby had become firmly entrenched in N'Djamena, Qadhafi's presence was no longer welcome by the RCC in Darfur. Although his tattered Islamic Legion remained until 1996, Bashir and the RCC were free to crush any opposition in Darfur, whether historic, ethnic, or religious. In August 1991, he appointed the sinister Colonel al-Tayib Muhammad Khari, chief of Islamic security and known as *al-sjikka*, the iron bar which he used to quell anti-Islamist street riots in Khartoum, governor of Darfur. *Al-sjikka* began the methodical suppression of the Fur but also the Zaghawa who were forcibly disarmed and some 12,000 of them repatriated to their kinfolk in Chad by February 1992.

While Déby and Qadhafi were preoccupied during the next two years with the long-standing dispute over the Aozou Strip, al-Bashir's Islamist government relentlessly sought to consolidate its control in Darfur. In February 1994, the Minister for Federal Affairs and hardline NIF Islamist, 'Ali al-Hajj, arbitrarily redrew the administrative district boundaries within the province into separate states. This seemingly innocuous administrative reshuffle to conform to the new program of federalism was deliberately designed, however, to promote the Arabization of Darfur by gerrymandering the hitherto homogeneous Fur districts so that the Fur would henceforth be a marginalized minority in each, with far-reaching consequences. The administrative officials of these new states, which now constituted the whole of Darfur, had been appointed without consultation. They were invariably Arabs of the *Awlad al-Bahr* from Khartoum, not Darfuri Arabs, and were bitterly resented by Arab and non-Arab Darfuri alike. In their

eagerness to promote the Arabization of Darfur, these officials were contemptuous of local customs, including the indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution (the *jawed/muatamarat al-sulh*), which now were replaced by the arbitrary judgments of supercilious but ignorant riverine Islamists from NIF.

Having effectively paralyzed any concerted Fur opposition, the Islamists next turned to the compact hierarchical Masalit. In 1997, all of the traditional Masalit chiefs, who wielded great influence in Dar Masalit, were stripped of their authority; many were imprisoned, others tortured. The fiercely independent Masalit prepared to retaliate by guerrilla war, which erupted the following year, when the Arab Bani Husyan from Kabkabiya in North Darfur State began to move south much earlier than usual with their herds and flocks, which frequently wandered onto the farmland and trampled the crops of Masalit farmers. During the subsequent clashes several hundred Masalit were killed, over 100 villages destroyed, and some 5,000 Masalit fled to Geneina as internal refugees or Chad. Despite a fragile agreement, in which £S9million was levied on both sides as blood-money compensation, the fighting resumed in January 1999 when the Bani Husyan again arrived earlier than expected in Dar Masalit. The conflict, now fueled by revenge for the depredations of the previous year, turned into fierce firefights with significant casualties. Khartoum called the Masalit insurgents a “fifth column of the SPLA,” sealed Dar Masalit, and unleashed the Arab militias. In 1999, the Arab militias had yet to win the infamous sobriquet, *janjawiid*, for at that time *janjawiid* had long been a common term in Dar Masalit for bandits of any ethnicity operating from Chad. The Masalit were thoroughly crushed. Over 2,000 were killed, nearly 3,000 *tukls* (homes) burned to the ground, and large numbers of livestock looted. Fourteen Masalit leaders were sentenced to death by hastily contrived special courts; some 40,000 Masalit fled to refugee camps in Chad, where more than 100 were killed when Arab militias attacked the camps in a cross-border raid. The fiercely independent Masalit sulked in the ruins of their dar, swearing vengeance.

Throughout Darfur an ominous silence settled over the land as General ‘Abdalla el-Safi al-Nur of the northern Rizayqat, influential in the Arab Gathering, and outspoken advocate of Arabization, was appointed governor of North Darfur State in 2000. His first orders were to collect all arms from the non-Arab police, but particularly the *zuruq* (black African) police, who historically composed nearly 80 percent of the police force in Darfur since the days of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. Having methodically neutralized the only legally armed force who would oppose Arabization, he handed over the weapons to Musa Hilal of the camel-herding Abbala Rizayqat, the “Shaykh of the Swift and Fearsome Forces,” who actively recruited 20,000 Chadian Arab and Baqqara to become the nucleus of the *janjawiid*.

The following year, on 21 July 2001, a group of Fur and Zaghawa activists met at Abu Gamra and swore an oath on the *Qur’an* to despoil the Arab suprema-

cists in Darfur. The Fur were represented by ‘Abd al-Wahid al-Nur, a lawyer, and Abdu ‘Abdalla Isma’il, a graduate in modern languages; the Zaghawa by Khatir Tur al-Kalla, ‘Abdalla Abakir, and Juma’a Muhammad Hagar, all of the Tier branch of the Sudanese Zaghawa who had accompanied Idriss Déby during his victorious march to N’Djamena in November 1990. They set out to forge an alliance of the non-Arab peoples of Darfur and met with Masalit activists in November 2001 to seek logistical and political support for the movement, and began training Fur and Zaghawa guerillas in camps hidden in the Jabal Marra massif. On 25 February 2002, they staged their first joint operation, an assault against an isolated garrison in the southern mountains. This event marked the beginning of the disaster in Darfur which continues to the present day. The international community neglected to notice the curtain rising in 2002 for the next episode of the drama called the struggle for control of Darfur. But they also remain resolutely uninformed of its historical antecedents.

Suggested Readings

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