

Review of Julie Flint and Alex de Waal Darfur: A Short History of a Long War Zed Books, 2005.

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Short indeed: at 134 pages, bright bursts of prose flap noisily over the Sahel, marking here the good (SLA) and there the bad (GOS). This book (and the articles and commentary that preceded it) has already had a deep impact on Sudan Studies and the general public's understanding of the crisis in Darfur. The detail and depth are extraordinary, the shortcomings understandable.

The *janjawid* are introduced first. They kill 75 persons, rape more than 100 women, and abduct 350 in just one raid in 2004 (p. 36). They commit atrocities; they are rapacious; they are racist. Musa Hilal readily poses for Julie Flint (p. 37); moral decay drips from the photo. His not-so-secret Arab Gathering documents the authors translate (pp. 38-9). For Flint and de Waal (p. 54), "no sooner had [the Qoreishi idea] been published than Darfur was engulfed in a civil war." Flint and de Waal argue that the Arab Gathering and *janjawid* are responsible for not one but rather three wars. The first pitted the Arab Gathering supporters against the Fur, in 1987-89. "Jihad was unleashed," in order to bring about "Arab domination" (pp. 57-8). The second pitted the *janjawid* against the Masalit in 1996-98. The third is the current war, which they date as starting in 2002, pitting the *janjawid* against a Fur-Zaghawa-Masalit alliance.

For Flint and de Waal, there is a web of connections that makes the Khartoum military regime both part of and patron of the *janjawid*. The regime incontrovertibly provides impunity, abnegating the pretense of sovereign responsibility to prevent and prosecute extra-judicial killings of civilians. Flint and de Waal provide considerable suggestive evidence of conspiracy and criminal premeditation by members of the Khartoum regime. Their conclusion could not be more forceful (p. 65): "Powerful men in government in Khartoum were giving the orders."

The Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) is a reaction to the *janjawid* and GOS. An important inversion; most accounts present the *janjawid* as emerging from a government counter-insurgency against a surging SLA after the April 2003 attacks. The SLA could not be more different from the *janjawid*. In the photo of p. 67, the troops sit democratically under a tress with their commander. They are "unlikely" rebels, pious Muslims, strikingly courteous, with gnarled peasant hands. The early Fur organizers of the SLA are "young activists."

The war story of Darfur as told by Flint and de Waal is straightforward. Through conviction and interest, the dominant military and security oligarchy of Khartoum sided with the forces of the Arab Gathering and *janjawid* against the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit. Leaders of these marginalized groups tried, ineffectually in the end, to retain their place in Darfur society.

The Khartoum regime was the winner all around. The *zurga* groups have been completely neutralized; a potentially wealthy and resurgent Chad has been destabilized; humanitarian booty is ripe for looting; and the SPLA has been discredited as a moral and national political force. Time to count our money, you can hear the Arab elite humming.

Surprisingly for a book that is so clear in diagnosis (there are powerful criminal actors responsible for crimes against humanity), there seems to be little thought given to a hopeful "endgame" (as the last chapter of the book is entitled). There is no hope in a beefed up African

Union. An aging Rizegat *nazir* is presented as the “last best hope” but clearly the authors do not put much stock in that. Flint and de Waal cannot make up their minds about the role of the United Nations. On page 126, they note that it took less than a year for the Security Council to begin taking actions, in May 2004, on Darfur. On the next page Darfur is, “the problem that no one wanted to acknowledge.” Strange, because just four months later the Security Council created an International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur and just four months after that the Security Council referred the report of the commission to the International Criminal Court. In the process, of course, the United States backed away from its intransigent position against the ICC. Flint and de Waal (p. xiv) pooh-pooh these reactions as “too little too late,” but they provide no comparative perspective to enable the reader to determine whether that really was the case, or whether for the Security Council this was aggressive action taken at lightening speed. Without a metric for judging the timing and severity of the measures taken, it seems unseemly to arrive at a judgment. What if the Security Council reactions have been significantly faster and more directed than the average response of the past several decades. Should we not be applauding and encouraging? My prior is that the Security Council and other international agencies have been relatively quick to respond in a serious way to the crisis, rather than relatively foot-dragging, when the crisis in Darfur is viewed in comparative perspective (Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d’Ivoire, Iraq, Afghanistan, Aceh, Colombia, etc.).

The book of course was hastily written, given the rapid unfolding of the crisis. Sometimes the result borders on glibness. On p. xiv, “Darfur needs massive social and economic development,” and, “generous and sustained international involvement to oversee a return to the rule of law.” How much is massive and what kind of development...? Emblematic is the unexplained photo of a young boy, Hussein Dafa’alla. Presumably, the photo is to reinforce the implicit thrust of the book that young boys such as Hussein deserve a future free of violence and away from a refugee camp. Two photographs (pp. 110-11) following a *janjawid* attack on the old capital of the Fur sultanate in Shoba do not equate to a thousand words. Adam Abdel Aziz Hilu, an SPLA commander, crops up as a companion to Daoud Bolad, and then disappears. Did his fate not warrant mention?

But overall, there is no doubting the importance of the contribution, and the book will serve as indispensable reference point for understanding the origins and unfolding of the Darfur crisis.