

# Darfur People: Too Black for the Arab-Islamic Project of Sudan, Part II

*Abdullabi Osman El-Tom, Ph.D.*

## Prelude

'Any village you pass through you must burn. That way, when the villagers come back, they will have a surprise waiting for them' (an Antonov pilot ordering a ground commander of a government army battalion in Darfur, Sudan; US Senator John McCann 2004).

An Antonov pilot over Darfur reports to his Khartoum commander: 'There is nothing under me except grass cottages, Sir.' 'I order you to bomb them and expel their religion (tally deenhun; render them unbelievers)', the commander answers back (Government military communication recorded by JEM).

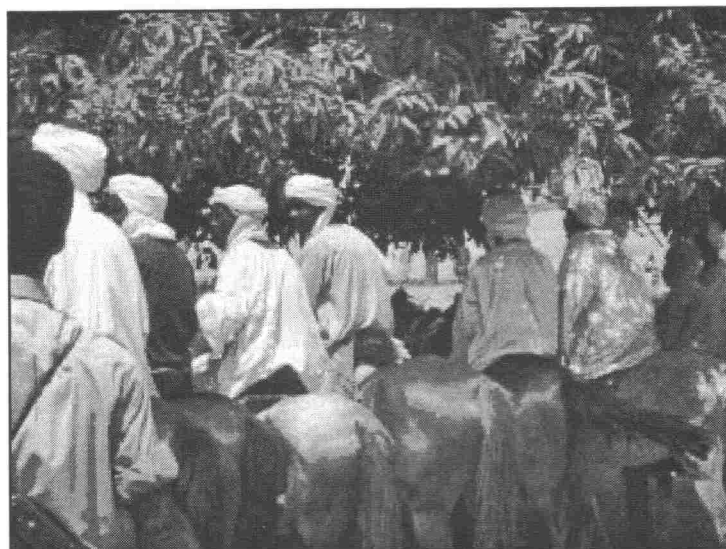
## Introduction

This article throws some light on certain aspects of the Darfur crisis, which started in 2003. The Darfur rebellion is not a product of one day; rather, it is an outcome of several decades of oppression and exploitation by central governments.

## The Black Book, the Hegemony of the North and the Zapping of Darfur

Anyone who is interested in unveiling Darfur's grievances and hence the current rebellion doesn't need to go very far. The question of Darfur is well articulated in the well-known publication *The Black Book of Sudan: Imbalance of Wealth and Power in Sudan*. This is a mysterious book, which appeared in the streets of Khartoum in 2000. At the time of its appearance, the Book was produced by an unknown group under the name of Seekers of Truth and Justice. We now know that most of these authors come from the current Darfur group, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

The mystery of the Black Book was compounded by its impeccable method of distribution, which was executed with military precision. A once-off distribution of the book took place at Friday prayer in the capital to avoid tight government censorship. Within days the Book took on a life of its own. With no copyright attached, the Book continued circulating through spontaneous



Arab militia - janjaweed. (Photo credit of Commandant Bernard Markey, Irish Defence Forces)

photocopying. Most readers of the Black Book had not seen an original print of the document. Within days, the book became a topic of conversation at every grass-roots venue in the Sudan. While only 500 copies were printed by the authors, the free duplication of the book led government Security to put the figure at 10,000. Part Two of the Black Book followed four years later (JEM 2004, El-Tom 2003).

In a nutshell, the book (Parts I and II) claims that Sudan has been controlled by the Northern Region throughout its independent history and that this control has remained the same irrespective of the nature of the government of the day. The Northern hegemony has prevailed through democratic, theocratic, socialist and military governments alike. The domination of the North, which is reckoned to constitute only five percent of Sudan's population, is so pervasive and has been maintained at huge cost to the nation. This disparity of wealth and power created a deep sense of political grievances leading to the current crisis in the country. Let me now try to throw some light on this thesis. The claim is supported by an impressive array of statistics showing the regional origins of all key office holders in the country, Ministers, heads of Sudan Central Banks, Prime Ministers, Heads of Universities, etc.

To begin with, all the Presidents/Prime Ministers of the Sudan have come from the five percent of the Northern Region. Going through the ministerial positions dating from 1956 to 1989, a whopping 62% went to the North while only 11% went to the Western Region which includes both Darfur and Kordofan and which area holds 33% of Sudan's population. During the first decade of the reign of the present government (Albashir's), the North controlled 60% of the national ministerial positions, while the share of Darfur with its 20% of Sudan's population was around 11%. The same pattern of government domination can also be seen in membership of the Revolutionary Command Council where the North had 53% representation while Darfur had just 13%. 50% of the Presidential Advisors also came from the North as opposed to 10% from Darfur (Table 1).

State Governors too did not escape this Northern hegemony. During the same period, 40% of State Governors came from the North, while the share of Darfur remained dismal at 15% (Table 1). The statistics of power sharing if not power holding are boringly similar throughout, leaving no hope for those whose fortunes destined them to have been born outside the ethnic groups of the Northern Region. The same pattern of high job allocation also occurs at other levels including the positions of Attorney Generals, Heads of Constitutional Courts, National Security, Police Force, Ambassadors, Bank Managers, the Gezira Scheme and the top Public and Semi-State companies (*ibid*).

This unusual disparity in high job allocation left a clear deficit in the developmental fortunes of non-Northern States. This is apparent in various developmental indices revealed in the Black Book. For example, Primary School enrolment is 88% for the North as opposed to 31% in Darfur. The rate of Hospital beds per 100,000 is 151 in the Northern Region compared to 24.7 in Darfur. Again there are 13.4 doctors per 100,000 in the Northern Region compared to 1.9 in Darfur (see Table 2, also Ibrahim 2004, cf. DFDPC 2005, Elzein et al. 2003). Using corroborative statistics from various sources including the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank, Cobham (2005:9) has this to say about the conclusions of the Black Book:

The Black Book of Sudan (Anonymous, 2004a and 2004b in English translation) sets out data showing the disproportionate access to power – since independence in 1956 – of the 5% of the population from the Northern states. It further makes the claim that this has led to distorted distribution of government resources and therefore of development opportunities. This paper has used the most recent reliable data, much of it provided by the current government itself, to explore this claim. The results offer overwhelming support.

**TABLE 1: Regional Division of Key Offices in Sudan**

Office/Item	Northern Region	Southern Region	Darfur Region
<b>1 As % of Sudan's Population</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>20%</b>
2 Presidents 1956 to present	All of Northern Origin	0	0
3 National Ministers 1989 to 2000	52%	13%	11%
4 Members of Revolutionary Command Council 1989 to present	53%	20%	13%
5 Presidential Advisors 1994–2001	50%	0%	10%
6 State Governors excluding Southern States	40%	All from the South	15%
7 Attorney Generals 1989–2000	50%	0%	0%
8 Heads of Constitutional Court	74%	13%	13%
9 Heads of National Internal Security	50%	0%	0%
10 Heads of External National Security	100%	0%	0%
11 Sudan Intelligence System	100%	0%	0%
12 Heads of National Police Force	44%	0%	0%
13 Sudanese Ambassadors (2000)	66%	6%	2%
14 Sudan Consuls	47%	2%	0%
15 Presidents of Universities (56)	55%	0%	17%
16 Managers of Bank of Sudan 1988–2000	100%	0%	0%
17 Managers of Other Banks and Financial Houses	67%	0%	1%
18 Managers of Gezira Scheme	100%	0%	0%
19 Major Public Companies (52)	73%	0%	0%

Source: Black Book of Sudan, 2004

### The Tripartite Coalition of the Northern Region

When the British colonial government left the Sudan in 1956, nationals had to be promoted to fill their vacated posts. There were altogether 800 new civil service posts. 778 of these posts went to persons from the Northern Province while the remaining eight Provinces of the Sudan were left to haggle over the leftovers. The divine right of the North to rule Sudan was thus inscribed in no uncertain terms. But there was a problem. The divine right had to be safeguarded against subsequent change of governments, some of these were democratic but most were not. But there was no limit to the genius of our Northern leaders and here lies the story of the tripartite coalition of the north (Kayan Alshimal, hence KASH). The term KASH can loosely be translated as 'the Northern Entity', referring to a body that was/is entrusted with promoting the interests of the Northern Region. But KASH is open only for elite ethnic groups, just in case other Northerners delude themselves, dreaming of being treated like proper Northerners. There is no place in KASH for 'lowly nomads' like the Manaseer of the Northern Region who claim Arab ancestry and it is equally off bounds for those unfortunate enough to speak Nubian or other African languages as a mother tongue. These non-Arabic languages are referred to as 'rutas' and that can simply be translated in the Arabic language as 'gibberish, incomprehensible' or simply 'bird's talk'. These rutas are considered no good and the sooner

they vanish from the Sudan the better. Not surprisingly, Sudanese who 'still' have a rutana feel embarrassed to show it. Speaking it is taken to be vulgar in the company of others and it is better to pretend not to have one at all. To have had one in the past is stigma enough, but to have one now is beyond forgiveness. Among other things, it means immediate exclusion from the Arab-Islamic club and you lose your right to belong. The Mahas of the Northern Region now deny that they ever had a rutana even though living memory proves otherwise (Hashim 2004). Most of these rutana groups in the North have remained virtually unknown to the rest of the Sudan with whom they share the fate of the marginalized majority. They are meant to remain non-existent, invisible except for nosy anthropologists and archaeologists.

So who are those members of the club? Well, no prize for guessing; you only have to check the Presidents and the Prime Ministers of the Sudan since independence and you will work it out. If your memory cannot take you that far back, not to worry, just pay attention to Albashir and his close associates in Khartoum's Presidential Palace. KASH is an exclusive club, barely big enough for the three most formidable ethnic groups of the North. These are the Jallayeen (President Albashir), the Shaigiya (Ex-President Sir Alkhatim, Current Deputy President Taha) and the Danagla (Ex-Prime Minister Almahdi, Ex-President Nimeiri, Ex-Deputy President Alzibair). So boringly uniform is this that it would be appropriate to rename the Presidential Palace in Khartoum as the KASH Palace, Northern Entity Palace or simply to register it for the Jallayeen, the Shaigiya and the Danagla. One does not need to have a sophisticated mind to conclude that this is no way to run a modern state. But this is precisely what has proved incomprehensible for our leaders to date.

But what is the function of KASH? Well it is plain and simple, irrespective of the nature of the government in Khartoum, democratic or otherwise, military or otherwise, fanatic or otherwise, socialist or otherwise,

**TABLE 2: Human Development**

Item/ Region	Northern Region	Southern Region	Darfur Region
% of Sudan's Population	5%	16%	20%
Primary School Enrolment	88%	21%	31%
Hospitals per 100,000	3.9	1	0.4
Hospital beds per 100,000	151	68	24.7
Doctors per 100,000	13.4	2.8	1.5

Source: Adapted from Ibrahim, 2004

jobs must remain in the hands of the boys and wealth must flow into the Northern Region. Other ethnic groups from the Northern Region can be co-opted from time to time, but rarely to key posts. However, by virtue of sharing the North with the eminent members of KASH, they ultimately benefit in terms of flow of resources into the Northern Region. As far as the rest of the country is concerned, they are only used if they prove their worth to KASH and only until political uncertainty is brought under control and a more worthy member of one of the elite ethnic groups is found. Thus when Turabi who is of northern origin was dislodged from power, a situation of extreme uncertainty arose in Khartoum. To deprive Turabi of any support from Darfur, Albashir rushed Ustaz Tigani Sirag, a Darfuri to occupy his position. Barely three weeks later, there was no need for a Darfuri in such a prominent position. When the dust had finally settled and Turabi, the once formidable imam of the regime, turned out to be no more than a paper tiger, Ustaz Sirag was not even granted the honour of being notified about his dismissal. The disappearance of his official car from in front of his office was enough to remind him of his place and teach him about the divine right of the North to rule the country, a right that he happily and humbly accepted for long.

KASH became a formal organisation following the abortive coup of Hasan Hesain in 1976. Although the attempt was orchestrated by Almahdi's Party, it was led by a Darfuri-born combatant. That was too much for the North. When the Northerners topple an elected government in Khartoum, it is often assumed that it must be for the good of the nation. Not if the leaders of the coup happen to be from the marginalised people. Thus, Hesain's attempt at power was immediately dismissed as that of mercenaries. The westerners who dared to challenge the northern hegemony were banished from the Sudan altogether. For a brief period, the state Radio, Radio Omdorman, described them as 'the Black Tigers' (Alfuhoud al-soud). The term was telling as it implied that other



Sudanese military. (Photo credit of Commandant Bernard Markey, Irish Defence Forces)

Sudanese nationals, and particularly the rightful rulers are/were something other than black. The term Black Tigers was subsequently replaced by the term mercenaries, a label which still freely and unashamedly circulates in popular Sudanese imagery. For days after the abortive coup the media in Khartoum continued to broadcast interviews with captive coup leaders. Their poor command of Khartoum colloquial Arabic was mocked and interpreted as evidence of their not belonging to Sudan, hence the term mercenaries.

In January 2005 Albashir's ruling National Congress Party concluded a peace agreement with the southern rebels, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army, popularly known as SPLM. The agreement, officially referred to as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), has been publicised as a model for all other African countries in similar circumstances; it is claimed that it guarantees a new Sudan of democracy, justice

and inclusiveness. Among its provisions, the CPA stipulates the formation of a new government of national unity along with a well-defined proportional division of all key national cabinet positions in the country. The government of national unity was formed in September 2005. Rather than reflecting the inclusiveness of Garang's vision of the New Sudan, the government of national unity appears to have been sabotaged by KASH and its insidious philosophy. According to the CPA, the Southern Region was to hold 16 cabinet positions in the national government, leaving 32 positions for the remaining five Regions represented by the Khartoum government. The allocation of these 32 cabinet positions was astounding. Surprisingly or otherwise, 20 of the 32 positions are filled up with personnel ethnically affiliated to one Region only and that is the Northern Region. Much worse, KASH's elite ethnic groups of the North, i.e. the Shaigiya, the Jallayeen and the Danagla control all the cabinet positions that went to the Northern Region. This is despite that fact that the Northern Region houses no less than 17 indigenous ethnic groups (Tables 3 and 4).

Before I leave this section, I must emphasise that not every member of the ethnic groups that form the tripartite alliance approves of the selfish and short-minded mission of KASH. Fortunately, these ethnic groups contain many citizens who are working hard and aspiring to build a just Sudan that is accommodative of all, irrespective of ethnic differences.

### **Khartoum, the 'White' City and its Black Belt**

1983 was the first time that Darfur had a Darfuri governor. The

struggle to have just that was not easy. It took a formidable uprising that brought the regional capital Alfasir to a stand still. At the end, the dictator Nimeiri had to concede and humiliatingly had to produce a Presidential Decree against his Constitution and withdraw his handpicked puppet nominee in favour of one acceptable to the people. That was an important gain but nowhere enough to assuage the feelings of marginalisation in the Sudan. Sadly, the media in Khartoum still thinks otherwise. For example, Khartoum intellectuals still maintain that the South has long been ruled by southerners and should have shut up and stopped complaining. By continuing the fight for more positions in the central government, the SPLM must harbour other ills. The same 'Home Rule' is now conceded to Darfur in the guise of federation or even regional autonomy. As far as Khartoum, the centre of power, is concerned, it is to remain off bounds for southerners and westerners alike.

Despite the existence of the River Nile, the Northern Region remains most

inhospitable for human habitation and with exceptionally low carrying capacity in comparison to many other Regions in the Sudan. Traditionally, the Northern Region has always been an area of out-migration. As the capital of a state and a seat of government dominated by Northerners, Khartoum became a favoured destination for immigrants from the Northern Region. Their access to jobs has, over the years, remained exceptionally high and disproportionate to the size of their population. But Khartoum too has attracted others from all over the Sudan. Lack of development in other regions of the Sudan made Khartoum, by default, attractive, if only to avail of the meagre services which it offered. Despite this, and oblivious to history, the Northerners seem to have extended their right to rule and treat Khartoum as a northern city. This view metamorphosed into a powerful ideology which holds that others like the Southerners and the Darfuris should forget about Khartoum and be content with ruling their own regions. Dream on KASH!

In his recent work on the current Sudan crisis, Hashim maintains that the name Khartoum, traditionally pronounced as Khertum, is of Dinka origin. Khartoum owes its name to the Dinka language, in which the words 'ker tom' refer to 'the river confluence'. (Hashim 2004: 41). It is to be noted that the term Khartoum has no Arabic origin. Earlier attempts to rewrite history by referring the term Khartoum to the Arabic origin

**Table 3: Old Habits Die Hard : 'Government of National Unity', formed September 2005**

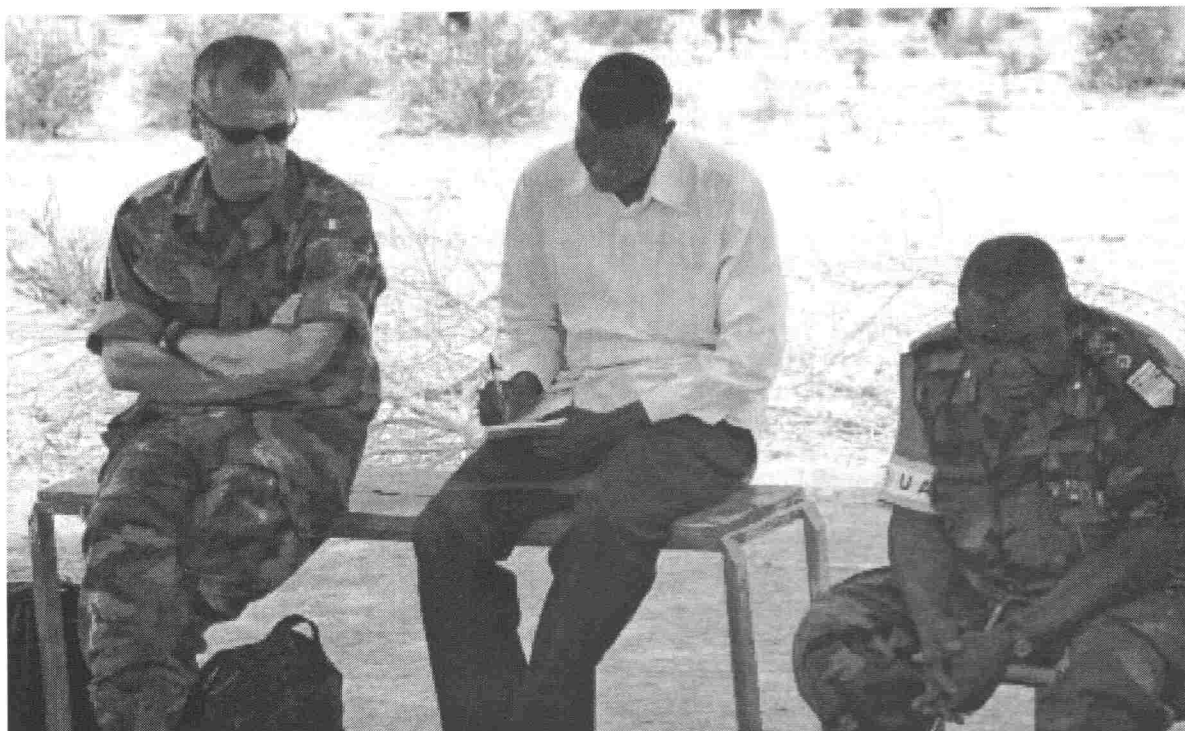
Region	No. of Positions	% of Pop
Southern	16	16
Northern	20	5.4
Kordofan	6	12
Darfur	6	20
Eastern	0	11
Central	0	20

Compiled by Author

**Table 4: Ethnic Composition of Cabinet Members from Northern Region, Government of National Unity, Sep. 2005, Excluding Southern Region**

Ethnic Group	Shaigiya	Jallayeen	Danagla	Others
No of Positions	3	12 ( <i>Albashir's ethnic group</i> )	5	0

Compiled by Author



Meeting in the bush. (Photo credit of Commandant Bernard Markey, Irish Defence Forces)

'khurtoum', meaning 'elephant's trunk' simply did not sell well in Sudanese schools. Moreover, and just 250 years ago, the White Nile area that extended north of Jabal Aulia on the outskirts of Khartoum was Shillukland (ibid). For those readers who are not familiar with the lands of Sudanese ethnic groups, let me note that the Dinka and Shilluk come from the Southern Region of the Sudan and count among the Christian and animist supporters of Garang's SPLM.

As for Omdorman, it owes its name to Darfur. Traders from Darfur who were not well versed in Arabic referred to a female food seller as mother of Abdurahman (umduraman). Recent history shows that, until the Mahdi's uprising (1885–1898), the city of Omdorman was nothing but a small market and a few scattered fishing hamlets.

The Northern ownership of Khartoum is not a simple dream. It is an ideology that successive governments have pursued with vigour. Reminiscent of the now defunct South African Apartheid system, and in the name of tackling fighting and loitering, those who were deemed too dark for Khartoum were often rounded up by the army and the police to be sent back to their very areas, which were impoverished by the Khartoum government. These raids were practised throughout the reign of all governments that have ruled the Sudan since the 1970s. However, this practice has become much harsher during the reign of Al Bashir's government and particularly during the time in office of Deputy President Alzibair whose hatred of the Gharraba, not to mention the Southerners, was legendary. Hashim says those who were herded out did not understand the action and thought that their leaders at the top had lost their common sense (Hashim 2004: 41). But it gets even more bizarre and you could

be forgiven for confusing Khartoum for an all white Afrikaner's city. The racist philosopher of the current regime, Hasan Mekki, portrayed Khartoum as a city besieged by black people. For that he invented or elsewhere popularised the unfortunate term 'Black Belt' (alhimam Alaswad), referring to those who live in the outskirts of Khartoum. These are impoverished sectors of the capital and most but not all of them are populated from the Southern and Western Regions. The eminent philosopher or more accurately bigot, described those 'black people' as descending to Khartoum filling it with flies during the day and spoiling its peace with night burglary. The 'Black Belt' is responsible for messing up the otherwise tranquil life of the – certainly not black – Khartoumese people. The inability of members of KASH to accept the very plain fact that they too are black has culminated in a deep inferiority complex. This complex, described by Mukhtar (2005: 6) as 'identity crisis', is chillingly and no less embarrassingly revealed in the following words:

In 1990, a group of Northern Sudanese in Birmingham in Britain convened a meeting to discuss how to fill in the Local Council's Form, and especially the question about the social category. They felt they did not fit in any of the categories that include, among others, White, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Black African, and others. It was clear to them to tick on 'Others', but what was not clear was whether to specify as 'Sudanese, Sudanese Arab or just Arab'. There was a heated discussion before they finally settled on 'Sudanese Arab'. When the question why not to tick on the category of Black African was raised, the immediate response was that, 'but we are not blacks'.

Well, Khartoum certainly belongs to the Northern Region. But in as much as it does, it also belongs to other

Sudanese irrespective of their colour shade, region or religion. Ironically speaking, the common denominator of those described as black here is neither colour nor, religion or even regional origin. It is poverty that is responsible for their marginalisation.

### The Road to War in Darfur

It is legitimate to question the wisdom of taking arms against the government of Khartoum and to assume that a peaceful way of addressing the problem would have been better. One thing is however sure in the case of Darfur. Arms were resorted to only after the failure of Khartoum to listen to the voice of peace, which was raised on numerous occasions by Darfuri leaders. Bizarrely, Albashir is famous for repeating in his public speeches that 'he negotiates only with those who raise arms'.

Callous dictators facing catastrophes often hide behind ignorance blaming their advisers for not conveying to them the extent of imminent disasters until it is too late.

With their strong control of the media, dictators always run the risk of forfeiting the use of, so to speak, 'early warning systems' that could make them act in timely fashion. Well, Albashir and his predecessors simply do not have the luxury of hiding behind ignorance. Despite his oppressive control over the media, Albashir's government knowingly sat and watched Darfur progressing towards war. Instead of extinguishing the fire, he and his government added more fuel to it.

I cannot possibly match Harir's excellent documentation of the Janjaweed atrocities in Darfur, which prevailed long before the current armed 'rebellion'. Harir shows how many opportunities were lost by reducing a clearly political problem to its military underpinnings (see Harir 1992, 1993). Let us start the debate from a much later date in the history of Janjaweed atrocities and government intransigence in Darfur.

January 1999 witnessed a colossal attack by the so-called Arabs on their African neighbours in West Darfur. The assault was orchestrated and assisted by the army and led to the death of over 100 unarmed civilians, the burning of 100 villages and the displacement of thousands all for the sake of land and wealth. The crisis led to a well-publicised condemnation by all political parties including the opposition parties. Albashir himself shed few crocodile tears and sent his envoy to bring things under control.

Darfuri people too did not stand idly by and engaged with the Presidential Palace, warning Albashir about the imminent disaster facing the country. Their Memorandum of March 1999 was accompanied by 1300 signatures of Darfuri dignitaries, including those of key figures in Albashir's government. The Memorandum was very detailed and covered the cause of the problem as well as outlining ways towards its circumvention. Had the government paid attention to that Memorandum and followed it to the letter, there would not be war now in Darfur. Instead, the government harassed those who signed the Memorandum and declared the crisis as nothing but a subversive action premeditated by enemies

of the government (see excellent documentation of the crisis by Abu Ahmed 2004).

### The Darfur Armed Movements

There are currently two main armed movements operating in Darfur. The Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) is the biggest. It is an offshoot of an earlier movement led by Bolad (see Harir 1993). Bolad, a Darfuri himself, was a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood of the 1970s and 1980s. Following his defection from the Muslim Brotherhood, he resurfaced in Darfur leading an SPLA (of Garang) battalion in 1991. His battalion was defeated and he was captured and later killed by his captors.

The second Darfur Movement operates under the title, 'the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement' (JEM). It operated as a clandestine movement throughout the 1990s but became known to most of us much later. JEM is famous for the publication of the Black Book of Sudan referred to earlier although some of the numerous authors (54) are now members of the SLM/A (see El-Tom 2003). JEM is often portrayed as an affiliate of Turabi's Popular Congress Party (not to be confused for the National Congress Party of Albashir), where many of its current leaders learned the ABCs of politics. This alleged connection with the Popular Party of Turabi has been over-milked by Albashir's government in an attempt to galvanise the Sudanese public against JEM. The success of Albashir in defaming JEM with such an alleged connection was so spectacular that several circles in the international community as well as international official bodies have also believed it. Views however are now changing regarding possible affiliation of JEM to the 'Islamist' Popular Congress Party of Turabi. During the Sixth Round of Abuja Talks on Darfur, Roger Winter, the US Special Representative for Sudan declared to the author that 'the US no longer maintains that JEM is affiliated to Turabi's Party'. The same view is also expressed in a recent book on Darfur by Flint and De Waal (2005).

Both SLM and JEM are broad organisations that accommodate many who are unified by broader objectives and a common enemy. The objectives of both Movements boil down to establishing a Sudan that is free of ethnic, colour, cultural, religious or regional marginalisation (see JEM 2005).

By the late 1980s, the government of Khartoum was fighting for its survival following numerous defeats in the south. It found new allies among the Janjaweed who were enticed by the promise of expanding their land and wealth base. It was a lethal marriage, exploited by certain 'Arab' groups to enrich themselves at the expense of other indigenous Darfuris. By 2002, the indigenous Darfuris, referred to as Zurga (Blacks), could not take it anymore. A perfect environment for armed insurgence ensued.

In February 2003, the Movements of Darfur began their assaults. It was clear from the beginning that it was an armed rebellion and not simply armed robberies as the government wanted to maintain. Darfuri people in

and out of the government approached the Khartoum authorities to move immediately and accept that the rebellion was instigated by political grievances that cannot be reduced to military operations. Khartoum listened and participated in the selection of a committee of 80 prominent people representing all stakeholders in Darfur. It was a wise course of action and the Committee soon moved into a positive debate with the so-called new rebels of Darfur. But Khartoum had another vision. For many at the top echelons, the Movements were no more than amateur boys who could easily be crushed by the army. In April 2003, Albahsir convened a Dual Summit with Deby, the President of Chad. The Summit worked out a plan to annihilate the armed movement and this intention was declared in no uncertain terms. Days after the summit, Darfur witnessed its most intensive aerial bombardment. The attack was brutal and indiscriminate and devoid of any strategy of targeting the rebels or sparing unarmed civilians. The assault continued non-stop for five days. The message to the rebels was crystal clear: attack the government troops and we will bomb your innocent people. This strategy still underlies Khartoum's military operations in Darfur (see prelude).

The response of the rebels was impeccable and swift. Even before the government's bombardment was over, 'the amateur boys' hit back. They attacked Alfashir, the capital of the Region and the seat of the army HQ, burning six airplanes, killing 32 army members and taking the Army Commander captive (later released unharmed). The rebels entered the army HQ and emptied it of its weapons and vehicles. Then they marched into the city centre for a rally and a speech before they withdrew with the loss of 20 men. Documenting this incident, Abu Khalid narrates that rebels had no interest in harming civilians including top government officials. They ordered many of them to leave their offices to their homes and that included the head of the Popular Defence Force, clearly a target given the circumstances (Abu Ahmed 2004: 16).

The successful attack on Alfashir was devastating for the government of Khartoum. Their new enemy proved to be more than a bunch of disorganized adventurers. As described by a top Sudanese Army General, their attack combined elements of military surprise, accurate timing, clear targeting and swift entry and exit with minimum casualties, a dream of every military commander.

As for the rebels, the attack on Alfashir was a turning point in their Movement. It clearly catapulted them into a force that cannot be taken for granted. Their attempts to avoid civilian casualties won them much praise in the city. It was clearly at odds with the normal behaviour of the Sudanese army, in peace or in combat. Through their public rally, the rebels were able to present their case and counteract government propaganda. Not surprisingly, the Movements have never since then run short of volunteers to go to the battlefield.

The predicament of Khartoum's government is getting worse. The marginalisation thesis has now reached every corner in the Sudan and is likely to lead to other similar rebellions. At least two other new movements have already declared war against Khartoum in recent months

and formed alliances with Darfur's Movements. These are the Shahama (Pride) Movement of the Misairia Arabs of Kordofan and the Maalia Arabs of Abkarinka in Darfur. The armed rebels in the East 'Red Lions and Beja Front' and numerous Arab groups have also signed a memorandum with the Darfur Movement. With that, it is clear that Khartoum's dilemma is now taking a different twist. In Khartoum's lexicon, these groups do not figure among the Zurga (Blacks) of Sudan. Rather, they are Arabs and hence part of the pool that has traditionally allied itself with the Khartoum government. Perhaps receiving Garang's SPLM in Khartoum is after all not that bad. It is a lesser evil. At least Khartoum's rulers can still count on the Islamic card that can be raised to keep 'Christian' SPLM at arm's length and to rally others against them. That cannot be done with the Gharraba (westerners). They may prove too close for comfort and a much harder nut to crack.

## References

- Abu Ahmed, Khalid 2004. 'Darfur, Watergate and the Politics of Lies'. <http://www.sudaniem.com>
- Cobham, Alex 2005. *Causes of conflict in Sudan: Testing the Black Book*. QEH Working Paper Series No. 121. Oxford: University of Oxford.
- DFDPC 2005. *Economic and Developmental Axes: Darfur Working Document*. Darfur Forum for Dialogue and Peaceful Co-Existence (DFDPC). Khartoum. 28pp.
- El-Tom, Abdullahi 2003. 'The Black Book of Sudan: Imbalance of power and wealth in Sudan'. *Journal of African International Affairs* 1(2): 25-35. Also in *OSREA*, 2002, and in *Review of African Political Economy* 30(97) 2003, 501-511 (Joint authorship with M.A.Salih).
- Elzain, Adam et alii 2003. *Development is key for peace in Darfur*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Khartoum (In Arabic).
- Flint, Julie and Alex de Waal 2005. *Darfur: A short history of a long war*. London: Zed Books.
- Ibrahim, F. 2004. *Ideas on the background of the present conflict in Darfur: Discussion Paper*. Germany: University of Bayreuth.
- Hashim, Mohammad Jalal 2004. *To be or not to be; Sudan at crossroads*. <http://www.sudaniem.com>
- Harir, S. 1992. 'Militarization of the conflict, displacement and the legitimacy of the State: A case from Darfur, Western Sudan'. Paper presented to CDS, University of Bergen, Norway.
- Harir, S. 1993. 'Racism in Islamic discourse! Retreating nationalism and upsurging ethnicity in Dar Fur, Sudan', Paper presented to CDS, University of Bergen, Norway.
- Justice and Equality Movement, 2004. 'The Black Book: Imbalance of Power of Wealth in Sudan, Part I and II'. English Translation. UK: JEM.
- Justice and Equality Movement, 2005. 'A proposal for change: Towards a Sudan of justice and equality'. UK: JEM.
- Mukhtar, Al-Baqir Al-Afif 2005. 'The crisis of identity in Northern Sudan: a dilemma of a black people with a white culture', in C. Fluehr-Lobban and K. Rhodes (eds.), *Race and identity in the Nile Valley: ancient and modern perspectives*. The Red Sea Press.