

superiority was used to justify them. Similar tactics, including mass rape, were used against the Nuba of Kordofan, another group involved in the southern rebellion.⁶ And as recently as last March, well after the cease-fire in the south, government-backed militias launched systematic attacks on villages in SPLM-controlled areas of the Upper Nile.

In the case of the south, where the victims were non-Muslims, the official rhetoric justifying the attacks used the vocabulary of holy war, of jihad. Murahaliin were transformed into Mujahideen. But the unofficial rhetoric of the conflict was racial, employing the terms *abid* (slave) and *zurga* (literally "blue," meaning black, i.e., not Arab, in Sudanese language), words that bear the weight of a history of discrimination and exploitation in Sudan, where ethnic groups claiming Arab descent assume a superiority over others. In the case of Darfur, the inhabitants are all Muslim, with the exception of some displaced southerners, but the province is a patchwork of Arab and non-Arab groups, of which the Fur are one of many. In the present conflict, in the absence of religious difference, it is racial rhetoric that has come to the fore. Adherents of the two rebel movements, the SLA and the JEM, are drawn, in varying proportions, from the three major non-Arab or "African" groups in the province, the eponymous Fur, the Massaleit, and the Zaghawa, while the Janjawiid are drawn from a num-

⁶See *Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan* (African Rights, 1995).

ber of pastoral Arab tribes who move in the same territory and compete for natural resources and political power.

It is only recently, however, that the division between "Arab" and "African" has achieved its present level of political significance in Darfur. The distinction is not straightforward. The Islamic presence in Sudan as a whole originates from the Arabian peninsula: over centuries of Islamization many indigenous peoples in the Nile valley came to claim Arab ancestry, to speak Arabic rather than their own languages, and to embrace Arabic culture. Thus about half the inhabitants of northern Sudan (a term which includes western provinces such as Darfur) are, by their own definition, Arabs. Non-Arabs—who are generally physically indistinguishable—retain their indigenous languages, although Arabic is the lingua franca of the country. From this point of view Sudan can be said to be an Arab country in some sense like the sense that the United States is an Anglo-Saxon country.

The nomadic Arabs of Darfur, who provide the recruits for the government-controlled militias, are a world away from the settled Arab elites who control the state. They are closer, in most ways, to their non-Arab neighbors, even in the Arabic they speak. (The word "Janjawiid," for instance, by which the militias are known, and which has achieved global currency in international coverage of the crisis, is unknown elsewhere in the country.) In Darfur, moreover, ethnic distinctions are changeable: nomads and farmers share the same territory; they may intermarry even as they com-

pete for land and water; Fur and others who acquire cattle can be incorporated into Baggara families, becoming Arabs within a generation.

A doctrine of solidarity among Arab groups throughout Sudan is increasingly invoked to link the pastoral Arabs of the west to the Arab-dominated central government. The rebel groups in Darfur, however, prefer to stress a history of discrimination against the region as a whole as the cause of the war, rather than the ill-treatment of non-Arabs per se.⁷ The internal history of conflict and cooperation between ethnic groups in Darfur is one of Balkan complexity and, as in

experiment with radical Islam, which ended with the British invasion and defeat of the Mahdi's successor in 1898, bears comparison with the present day.⁸)

The sultanate was briefly restored after the British defeat of the Mahdi in 1898, and then, in 1916, it was incorporated by force into the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. For fifty years thereafter, under British rule, Darfur, like southern Sudan, was a neglected outpost of empire. It was during this period, in the central northern region of the country, that the leading families of the settled, Arabized tribes along the Nile (including the descendants of the Mahdi) consolidated their control of trade and commercial agriculture and ultimately



the Balkans, differing interpretations of this history become part of the conflict.

Darfur was an independent sultanate that controlled the desert trade route between West Africa and Egypt. It embraced Islam in the early 1800s. Though named for the *dar* (homeland) of the Fur people, the sultanate drew its administrative elite from a number of ethnic groups that included Arabs. In the 1880s, embroiled in resistance to the revolt led by the Mahdi, a millenarian Islamic religious leader, against Turco-Egyptian rule, the sultanate was overrun by Baggara (cattle-keeping Arab pastoralists) allied with the Mahdist forces. (This period of Sudan's first

A samizdat publication, "The Black Book: Imbalance of Power and Wealth in the Sudan," appeared in Sudan in two parts in 2000 and 2002. The book is an ad hominem analysis of the regional and tribal origin of office-holders in governments of Sudan since independence, aiming to show the disproportionate representation at the top levels of government and administration of individuals from a single region of the north, i.e., riverain Arab tribes. A translation of "The Black Book" is available on the Web site of the Justice and Equality Movement, www.sudan-jem.com/english/english.html.

—as independence approached—state institutions, which they have continued to dominate, under both military and democratic regimes, since independence in 1956.

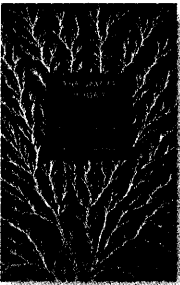
The current military regime of General Omar al-Bashir, which is known as the Ingaz (Salvation) government, came to power in a military coup in 1989, after overthrowing the elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi, grandson of the Mahdi. The power behind the throne in the Salvation government, until a split in 2001, was the Islamist thinker Hassan al-Turabi, who is Sadiq's brother-in-law. Turabi was the architect of a new Islamist program that reached beyond the Arab elites to include Muslim African peoples in Darfur and elsewhere. But Turabi now languishes in Kober prison in Khartoum, accused of links to one of the rebel groups in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement. The Salvation government, like its civilian predecessor, seems to have

⁸See R.S. O'Fahey, "A Complex Ethnic Reality with a Long History: Darfur," *International Herald Tribune*, May 15, 2004; and R.S. O'Fahey and J.L. Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (London: Methuen, 1974).

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*Taken from *The Waste Books* by Lichtenberg, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (NYRB, 2000), p. 115

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