



# Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide

*Gérard Prunier*

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## **Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide** Gérard Prunier

In mid-2004, the Darfur crisis in western Sudan erupted onto the world stage, with the unfolding genocide portrayed by the world's media as an Arab/African clash. Gerard Prunier sets out the ethnopolitical make-up of the Sudan and explains why this rebellion is regarded as a key threat to Arab power in the country.

## **Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide Details**

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### Arielle says

Very concise, yet informative source to learn more about Darfur. Because it's so tightly written, it's a bit of a difficult read - lots of information packed into not that many pages - but well worth it. I particularly appreciate the author's insistence on expressing the complexity of the situation and not watering things down just to make it easier for the reader to understand.

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### Jeanne says

I recommend reading this one after the De Waal/Flint book, it goes into more historical detail and is a bit more dense. I'm not sure I agree with Prunier's idea of an ambiguous genocide - it seems like parsing words to me.

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### Charles says

I had to read this book about four times before I could characterize the theme/message.

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### Jane says

I found this to be a difficult read due to the constant use of initials to signify the different political groups involved. It may have made it a longer book to spell out the full name of each group, but there were just too many groups & too many foreign phrases to deal with. There were reference pages; two sets at the beginning plus the footnotes at the end; but it required constant flipping back for those & forward for the footnotes (too many) to make this a comfortable read.

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### Daniel says

Prunier's fact-filled and clear-eyed account of the Darfur crisis is sobering. Although the dry writing and numerous details make for an unusually long 150 pages, this is a must-read for anyone seeking more than the cursory—and frequently inaccurate—overviews provided by Western media outlets. Prunier—who has also written on the Rwandan genocide—has produced an authoritative and balanced account.

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### Joan says

If the only thing you know about Darfur is that the President of Sudan is evil incarnate, you owe it to yourself to read this slim volume to get grounded in the roots of this conflict and the heartache consuming

Darfur.

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### **Tiffany says**

The only complete history and criticism of the crisis in Darfur. Prunier presents the facts in a straightforward and intelligent manner.

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### **Liliana Bachelder says**

how the f### things got that way in Darfur

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### **DoctorM says**

A quick but razor-sharp analysis of the slaughter and ongoing quasi-genocide in Darfur, the impoverished western areas of the Sudan. Like Prunier's "Africa's World War" about the Congo Wars after 1996, you'll have to keep the glossary at hand to keep track of the political parties and militias involved--- alphabet soup once again ---but Prunier lays out a clear and concise history of Sudanese politics since independence and how what began as a localised dispute over grazing/water issues and regional politics was transformed into savagery and desolation. Prunier notes that the Darfur crisis wasn't the result of "immemorial" ethnic hatreds, but was haphazardly manipulated by outsiders--- the Arab elite in Khartoum, the Islamist parties, Qaddafi's Libya, Chadi factions, and even the SPLA forces in Sudan's war in the South ---until it imploded.

Prunier is very clear here about the origins of the slaughter. The elite in Khartoum saw any signs of political demands by the population of western Sudan as a challenge to traditional rule by Nile-Arab groups. The Darfur population was Muslim, but "African" rather than "Arab", and disdained and historically ignored by the "river Arab" political class who dominated the government, army, and civil service. Khartoum responded with a baffled rage to demands for political equality by westerners and outside forces--- fighting between Libya and Chad, Libya's desire to build a Libyan-dominated "Arab" Africa, Islamist need for an enemy to build their own political base in Khartoum, the Christian SPLA looking for allies against the Arab government ---deepened local tensions and fighting until the slaughters of 2003-04 began.

What took place in Darfur is what Prunier calls a "quasi-genocide". Unlike Khartoum's clear intentions in the Juba mountains to destroy a local population, or its imposition of essentially slave labor in the South, Darfur was so horrible simply because there was no central plan--- just a haphazard, random, uncaring, contradictory brutality. ("Depraved indifference" may be the legal term) The *janjaweed* horseback militias and improvised airstrikes were employed without any real plan or real control, violence was visited savagely but almost at random. Khartoum never much cared what happened to the Darfuri--- alive or dead, displaced, ethnically cleansed or simply cowed ---so long as there were no demands to share power or lessen the dominance of the river Arabs.

"Darfur" is short, clear, and a quick read. Very much a fine introductory book.

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## Peter Owens says

Just the facts; incredibly dry, but dense in a way few short books can be.

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## Anna says

This is a good book if you want to go from 0 to 60 in terms of your knowledge of the Darfur conflict. It's easy to read and VERY thorough. Just be prepared for some moralizing near the end. Prunier is always very critical of the UN and other international agencies in his writing, and he makes no attempt to hide his anger, contempt, bitterness in his writing. Starts to sound like a tirade after a while.

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## Yves Gounin says

La lecture du livre de Gérard Prunier s'impose à qui veut comprendre la crise du Darfour. Pour avoir arpenté la Corne depuis plus de trente ans, depuis l'Ouganda d'Idi Amin auquel il consacra sa thèse jusqu'à l'Ethiopie où il dirigea longtemps le Centre français d'Etudes éthiopiennes, en passant par la Somalie ou le Kenya dont il reste l'un des meilleurs experts, Gérard Prunier connaît bien cette région et ses fausses évidences. Grâce à lui, le Darfour n'est plus seulement une crise humanitaire lointaine, terriblement violente et inéluctable. La crise du Darfour devient, par sa plume alerte, une crise authentiquement politique.

Situé aux confins du Tchad et du Soudan, le Darfour n'a jamais intéressé personne. Ce territoire grand comme la France est formidablement enclavé. Equidistant de l'Atlantique et de la Mer rouge, le Darfour est séparé de la Méditerranée par la barrière du Sahara. Au Sud, la malaria et les mouches tsé-tsé freinent les échanges (p. 26). Pendant plusieurs siècles le sultanat du Darfour vécut à l'écart de l'Histoire. Elle le rattrapa au tournant du XXème siècle, une première fois en 1874 sous l'effet de la conquête du Soudan par les Turco-Egyptiens, une seconde en 1916 sous les traits du colon anglais. Pour autant, avant comme après l'indépendance du Soudan en 1956, le Darfour demeura un territoire périphérique. Pendant la colonisation, pas plus d'une demi-douzaine d'administrateurs britanniques en assuraient la gestion. L'indépendance n'y a rien changé et Prunier - qui n'a guère d'indulgence pour le régime de Khartoum - montre le dédain dans lequel les awlad al-beled (les Arabes de la vallée du Nil) tiennent les awlad al-gharb (les habitants de l'Ouest).

Aussi n'était-il guère surprenant que se développent, dans ces marges délaissées, des mouvements politiques voire insurrectionnels réclamant sinon du pouvoir du moins de l'attention : le DDF dans les années 60, le SFDA après le coup d'Etat de 1989, enfin les guérillas du SLM et du JEM au début des années 2000. Face à cette guérilla, le régime de Khartoum lança une contre guérilla en armant des miliciens, les janjawid qui acquirent vite une sinistre réputation. Les villages suspectés d'abriter des guérilleros étaient razzés ; à cette campagne d'extermination succéda une campagne d' "attrition" (p. 229) par la faim et les maladies au moins aussi mortellement efficace.

La crise du Darfour est-elle, comme l'a écrit Alex DeWaal, une contre insurrection qui aurait mal tourné ? Gérard Prunier soutient au contraire que "la réponse armée ... d'un groupe racialement marqué ... décidé à mettre au pas un groupe ethnique qu'il considérait comme inférieur ... ne pouvait que déraiper" (p. 255). Y a-t-il pour autant génocide ? L'auteur pense que non, tout en soulignant que l'émoi suscité par le crime de 300.000 individus ne saurait varier selon que ses auteurs aient ou non des motivations génocidaires. Toujours est-il que manque probablement à ce génocide ambigu une intentionnalité, une "conférence de Wannsee

africaine" (p. 257), tout comme subsiste pour l'avenir une possibilité de vivre ensemble au Darfour qui semble avoir abandonné le Rwanda des Tutsis et des Hutus

Gérard Prunier consacre un chapitre passionnant à la perception de cette crise dans l'opinion publique internationale. Il souligne combien le conflit au Sud-Soudan a constamment biaisé l'appréhension de la crise au Darfour. Pendant plus de vingt ans, la communauté internationale a oeuvré à la fin de la guerre au Sud et, alors que les négociations allaient bon train au Kenya en 2003-2004, elle a refusé de se laisser distraire dans ses efforts par une autre guerre. Cet aveuglement a une seconde cause : l'obnubilation culturaliste qui caractérise nombre d'observateurs du Soudan. Pour beaucoup, la coupure entre le Nord musulman et le Sud chrétien est l'unique grille de lecture de la géopolitique soudanaise. Cette explication n'est pas sans fondements ; mais elle ne suffit à rendre compte ni de la guerre au Sud Soudan ni des autres rivalités, notamment inter-musulmanes, qui marquent l'espace soudanais. L'aveuglement a cessé en 2004 et le Darfour est macabrement devenu à la mode. Mais, sous l'effet combiné du tsunami asiatique et de l'euphorie de l'accord de paix "global" de Naivasha signé le 9 janvier 2005 entre le SPLM et Khartoum, l'opinion internationale s'est lassée, abandonnant à l'Union africaine et à l'ONU la gestion de cet obscur conflit.

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### **Becca says**

If I had to read this book for a class, I'm sure I would have gotten more out of it. It reads very much like a textbook, which is good considering the complexity of the topic. When I picked up the book, I was hoping for more of an overview on the situation in Darfur, but this book gives a great deal of detail on the history of the region.

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### **Adam Mattison says**

Well detailed, concise, and very readable. It provides a plethora of easily digestible information which would take forever for one to look up alone. Knowing very little about the topic before reading this book, I feel I know have a much more thorough grasp of the issues involved, and what has and has not been done to deal with the conflicts still currently underway. There are a few editing problems, but they do not inhibit the reader's ability to understand the book. The only major problem is keeping track of the acronyms, political parties, sporadic Arabic terms and other references which are not all explained in the glossary. Also, a few more maps would be helpful in keeping track of events.

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