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## Darfur and Sudan: The People, Politics, Conflict, and Recovery: An Introduction

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## Devotion

This special issue is dedicated to the lives tragically lost in Sudan. It honors the brave doctors who risked their own lives to care for the sick and wounded amid the chaos. It is for the youth who have stepped forward with courage, volunteering in Sudan or crossing borders to help refugees and internally displaced people.

It is for the women who rise every day to make meals, not just for their own families but for the countless others who have nothing to eat. It is for every woman or girl who has suffered sexual violence and may feel abandoned by the world.

This issue is also dedicated to the Massalit ethnic group, who have endured unimaginable and extreme violence. Their suffering is a call for urgent global attention. We also remember the countless others who have lost their lives, including individuals like Dr. Kabbash, a renowned economist who devoted his life to improving Sudan. His contributions, like those of so many others, will not be forgotten.

Finally, we extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this special issue.

**Darfur and Sudan: The People, Politics, Conflict, and Recovery: An Introduction**

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Imagine waking up in the middle of the night to a deafening silence, your heart racing, only to discover that everything you once had is gone. The home where you grew up—its walls filled with the laughter of your childhood and the warmth of family gatherings—has been seized by someone who believes it is their right to take it. You are told you no longer belong there. Powerless, you watch in disbelief as strangers parade through your home, sleeping in your bed, rifling through your belongings, and wearing your clothes as if they were always theirs. Memories that once brought you comfort now haunt you—because they are all you have left.

The business you worked tirelessly to build, the dream you nurtured for years, is now nothing but a lost hope buried under the weight of the chaos around you. Every plan, every aspiration, wiped away in an instant. And then comes the most unbearable pain of all: you have been separated from your loved ones. No goodbyes, no reassurances. Just a deep, aching void where your family once stood, and a gnawing uncertainty about when or if you will ever be reunited. Your life, your world, has crumbled, and you're left standing in the ruins, unsure of where to turn or how to move forward.

This is not just a personal story—it is the story of millions of Sudanese people. For so many in Sudan, one day was all it took for their lives to collapse. Homes that had been safe havens for generations were snatched away in an instant, leaving entire families displaced and scattered. The places they once called home, where their memories and futures intertwined, became battlegrounds for power and control, torn away from those who built their lives within them.

One day can change the fate of an entire nation. One day can shatter the dreams of a 5-year-old child, tear families apart, and turn a country into a distant memory. But what has been lost is not just the physical space of a home—it's the deep sense of belonging to one's *waten*, or homeland. It's the place that holds the promise of return after years of separation, the place that now feels unreachable. This is the heartbreaking reality faced by the Sudanese people, especially those from Darfur. Their homes, their communities, their sense of *Waten*—all have been taken from them, leaving behind nothing but the heavy burden of loss and a fragile hope that one day, somehow, they might reclaim what was stolen.

On April 15, 2023, life as they knew it was shattered. A devastating war broke out in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This conflict, largely ignored by much of the world, has brought unimaginable pain and destruction to millions. Media coverage has been sparse, and in the chaos, the suffering of an entire nation has been overshadowed and forgotten. People are unable to document what's happening on the ground because stepping outside could mean certain death. The RSF's brutal tactics are clear: "kill them all." The silence of the world has only deepened their agony.

The consequences of this war are catastrophic. Health systems have collapsed, leaving so many without even basic medical care. Hospitals that once served as sanctuaries of healing now lie in ruins. Vital infrastructure has been reduced to rubble, crippling the nation's economy and forcing everyday life to a grinding halt. Families have been torn apart, with many left grieving the loss of loved ones, and others forced to flee their homes with nothing but clothes on their backs. For women and girls, the situation is even more terrifying, as sexual violence and rape have become horrifyingly common. Hunger is widespread, with food supplies running dangerously low. The scale of displacement is beyond anything we could have imagined, with millions now uprooted, forced to find shelter wherever they can.

The numbers are staggering, but behind each one is a human story of pain and survival. Though the war makes it difficult to know the exact number of people killed, and some estimates suggest the number of deaths is much higher, at least 15,500 lives have been lost in more than 1,400 brutal incidents targeting civilians. Nearly 9.5 million people have been forcibly displaced, with 7.3 million struggling to survive as internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Sudan, and 1.9 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. And the hunger crisis is beyond devastating: 18 million people are now acutely food insecure, with five million facing starvation. Among them are thousands of pregnant women—7,000 new mothers who could die in the coming months simply because they lack access to food and healthcare (UN, June 18, 2024).

In Darfur, the situation is especially dire. In the city of El Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, relentless bombardments and aerial attacks have turned the lives of 1.5 million people and an additional 800,000 IDPs into a nightmare. Ethnic violence and atrocities are being committed against civilians, and as Martha Pobe, UN Assistant Secretary-General for the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, put it: “Civilians are in the line of fire. Nowhere is safe for them.”

Yet, despite these immense challenges, Sudan is a country with a rich history of resilience. Its people have faced countless hardships throughout their history, from colonial struggles to the civil wars that have torn the nation apart. But again, the Sudanese people have shown extraordinary strength and determination, emerging from the ashes like a Phoenix to rebuild their lives.

Sudan is more than just its conflicts. It is a land rich in natural resources, from the River Nile to fertile agricultural lands and vast deposits of gold and oil. Its history stretches back thousands of years, with ancient civilizations such as the Kingdom of Kush leaving behind stunning archaeological sites, including the famous pyramids of Meroë. Sudan's cultural heritage is a source of national pride, and its people are known for their warmth, generosity, and unyielding commitment to fighting for their rights.

The youth, in particular, have been a driving force behind Sudan's recent political changes. They were the backbone of the protests that led to the fall of Sudan's long-time president Omar al-Bashir in April 2019. And even after the new transitional government failed to meet their aspirations, they continued to fight for justice, democracy, and a better future. As Sudan navigates its path forward, its history serves as a guidepost, reminding the nation of its rich heritage and the lessons learned from challenges overcome.

This special issue explores the critical themes of identity manipulation, external influence, and grassroots leadership in Sudan's conflicts, with a focus on Darfur. It provides a comprehensive

examination of Sudan's complex socio-political landscape, offering insights into the interplay of identity, external influence, economic forces, and grassroots activism in shaping the country's future.

Eline Rosenhart examines how tribal identities were exploited by political leaders in Sudan and Chad to maintain power, exacerbating instability. Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil builds on this by analyzing how religious identity, particularly the debate over shari'a law, has been manipulated for political dominance, marginalizing minorities. Marwan M. Hamza discusses Darfur's armed movements. His research examines how armed movements have adapted during the recent conflict, analyzing their evolving relationships with native administrations, civil society, and political parties.

Externally, Raimundo Gregoire and Aseel Abdalla examine the roles of neighboring countries and global powers in Sudan's conflicts. Their work reveals how foreign actors, driven by strategic interests, often deepen political unrest while occasionally supporting peace efforts.

Economic exploitation, especially in gold mining, is another critical driver of conflict. Raphaëlle Chevrillon-Guibert and colleagues highlight how gold mining has fueled violence in Darfur, while Hassan Tawakol A. Fadol analyzes the impact of flawed economic policies on Sudan's instability. Lorenzo Belotti contributes to the economic discussion by examining sustainable tourism as a potential tool for Sudan's post-conflict economic reconstruction. Belotti's analysis suggests that developing the tourism sector could enhance livelihoods and foster sustainable development, providing a pathway for recovery that mitigates the environmental and social impacts of conflict.

Amidst these challenges, grassroots and women-led movements emerge as key agents of change. Mawa Mohamed and Shamsia Ramadhan emphasize the leadership of women in peacebuilding efforts in Darfur, while Dianne Kirby highlights the continued activism of Sudanese female refugees in Belfast. Meanwhile, the grassroots movements led by Sudan's youth continue to be a force for change in the country. Salih Mustafa and Marafi sheds light on the critical role of the Resistance Committees (RCs) throughout Sudan's ongoing political upheaval. Finally, Elias Opongo critically examines the shifting roles of armed movements and the failures of peace interventions, adding to the understanding of the ongoing obstacles to sustainable peace in Darfur.

Now we will leave you with a quote from a Sudanese people "For us, the survivors, it is not about what we lost. It is about what we didn't lose: hope and resilience."

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