

1 Darfur Crime Scenes

The Mass Graves of Darfur

“I was hiding and saw this,” Mohamed explained.¹ “I saw them take fifty-two men from my village, including my cousin, and they took them to the edge of the mountain, made them go on their knees, put the gun in their mouths, and shot each one of them.” He heard the attackers say that “we came here because we want to kill all the Black people.”

Mohamad is a member of the African Zaghawa tribe who lived in a small village near Karnoi in North Darfur. The Sudanese government feared the Zaghawa were leading a rebellion and targeted them early in 2003. Mohamed buried the last bodies and set out on a dangerous journey to a refugee camp in the neighboring Chad, where he became one among more than 200,000 Darfurian refugees. He was also one of those interviewed in the U.S. Department of State Atrocities Documentation Survey.

After patiently providing a detailed description of the attack and the attackers, and the names of slaughtered family members and villagers, Mohamed concluded in despair, “I just want to say the United Nations has come too late; there are too many people who have already died.” Four years later, the United Nations had still not arrived in sufficient force and numbers, and the toll of the dead continued to mount. More than five years later, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal

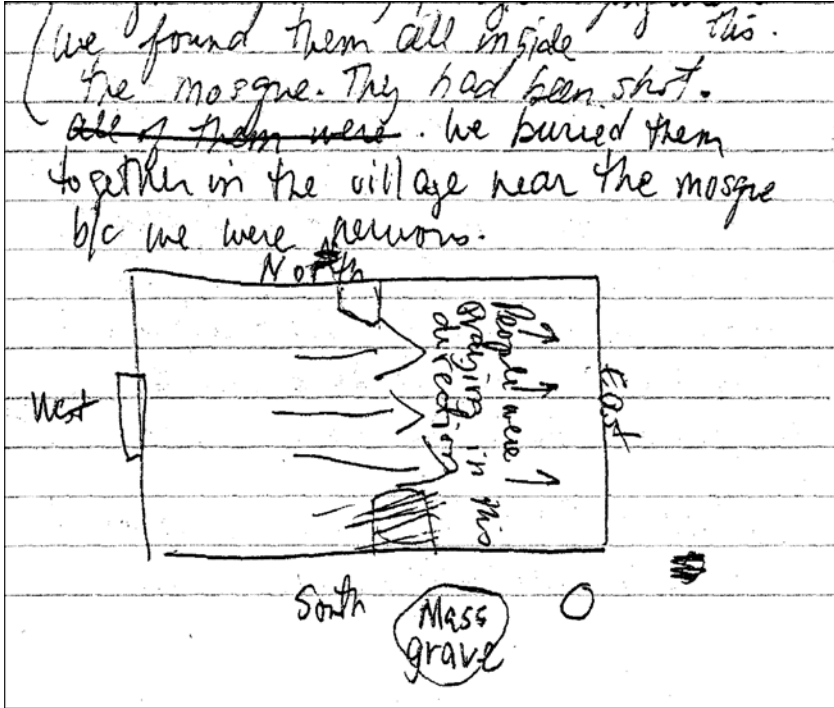


FIGURE 1.1. Rendering of Mass Grave Based on Interviews.

Court was still obliged to report to the UN Security Council that, “the entire Darfur region is a crime scene.”²

We assess the reliability and representativeness of the ADS survey reports in the Appendix to this book. Often, we rely on overlapping eyewitness accounts to assess their validity. Unfortunately, the massive-ness of the atrocities allows many opportunities for cross-checks. Some refugees drew maps of mass graves they left behind. Esikiel, a member of a Fur tribe, drew the accompanying map of where he buried the bodies of fellow villagers in a mass grave after an attack (see Figure 1.1). This burial and his description of the events displayed a reverence for the deceased and provided a poignant record of their deaths. Esikiel risked his own life by taking time to bury the bodies and make the witness statement.

DARFUR CRIME SCENES**3**

As in the Holocaust and other genocides, some of the grave sites in Darfur are massive and grotesque. Fatima, a female Zaghawa refugee, remembered, “Along the road there were many people dead, and there were also big graves with many people in them, because you could see hands and legs and other parts sticking out of the dirt on top.” This victim survived vicious rapes and now vicariously experienced these further acts of atrocity. She pleaded with the interviewer to “please let the Sudanese government know what we are telling you because they are saying that they don’t know anything and that nothing happened to us.”

Colin Powell’s testimony to Congress contained only a superficial summary of the Atrocities Documentation Survey (ADS) in an eight-page report. The ADS cost nearly one million dollars and included more than one thousand interviews conducted in Chad with refugees from Darfur. We report the details of the ADS in the following chapters. Here, we introduce in their own voices the stories of Mohamad and Esikiel and Fatima, as well as the many other refugees who shared their experiences of loss and survival during the genocide in Darfur.

The refugee interviews are a genocidal trove of evidence. They include a large amount of eyewitness evidence – including descriptions of weapons, locations of mass graves, names of dead and raped victims, names and descriptions of Arab Janjaweed militia leaders, and accounts of the government direction, supervision, and participation in attacks on Black African groups. The annotated drawing in Figure 1.2 of planes and vehicles used in the attacks shows the precision and detail of these eyewitness accounts. Survivors provided these details at the risk of revealing their identities and possibly losing their lives.

Such evidence is central to the legal charge of genocide and should not languish in U.S. State Department files. “They killed all our men,” a female victim explained. “I want those responsible prosecuted.” Both the qualitative and quantitative evidence are essential to providing a criminological description and explanation of genocide and holding the architects of genocide accountable. This evidence describes, in sequence, some of the salient empirical elements in the genocidal victimization of Black African groups in Darfur.

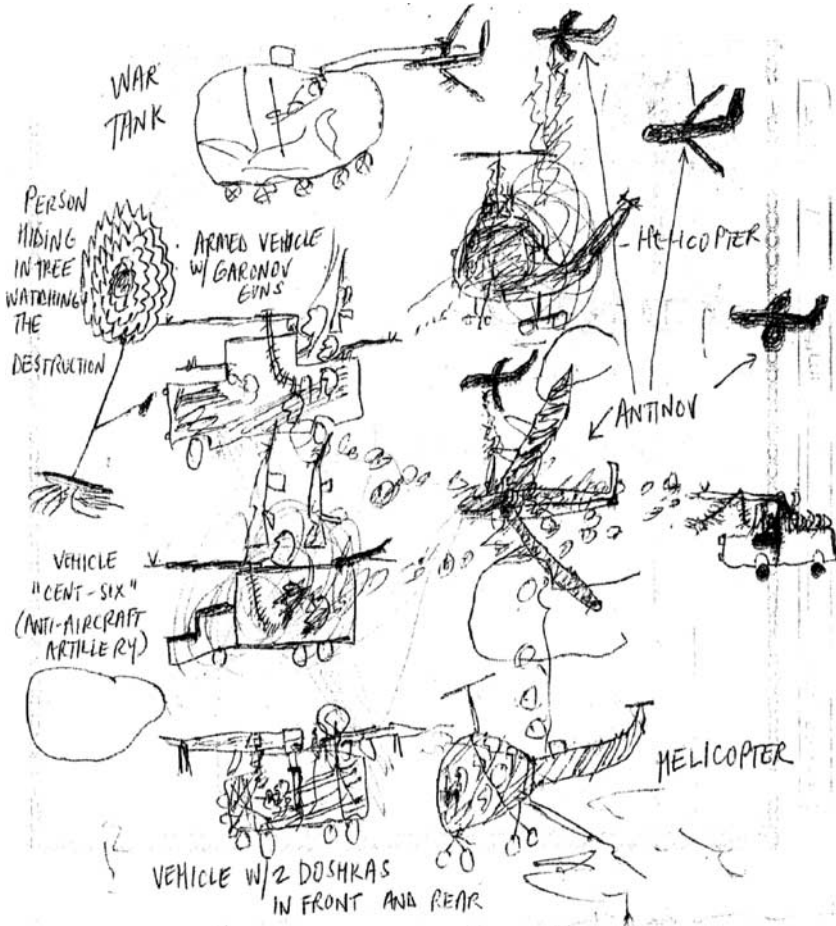


FIGURE 1.2. Drawings of Weapons Based on Interviews.

The Genocidal Pattern

Determining who dies and how many die is inevitably central to the history of a genocide, but there is much more to be documented. A pattern of elements characterized the repeated attacks by the Sudanese government and the Arab Janjaweed militia on African groups in Darfur. These elements are central to the theoretical model developed and tested in

DARFUR CRIME SCENES

5

this book. In this section, we use excerpts from the ADS interviews to introduce and illustrate key elements of the genocidal pattern of events in Darfur.

The first element is the background of tension between Arab and Black groups in Darfur. The Sudanese state, especially in recent years, has implemented Arab-Islamic supremacist and demonizing policies that pit Arabs and Blacks against one another in an “us” and “them” kind of conflict. This conflict is played out against a growing competition for land and resources between settled Black African farmers and predominantly nomadic Arab herders. The property, possessions, livestock, and the cultivated land itself are incentives for the crimes that are often at the core of genocides in Africa and elsewhere. In this chapter, we present Black African perceptions of the Arab-dominated Sudanese government’s role in the genocide in Darfur. Later chapters provide quantified evidence that substantiates these perceptions.

One refugee succinctly suggested, “There were some problems between Arabs and the Black tribes... The Arabs want to replace all of the Black farmers... The government supports the Arabs.” Other refugees drew a broader connection, however, between the more recent attacks in Darfur and the earlier and longer twenty-year conflict in southern Sudan: “We heard about problems between Arabs and Black tribes in South Darfur. Now there is an agreement between Arab tribes and the government to displace Black tribes. After that, they will let their animals live in our homelands.”

Another refugee went further back in history, noting that “since independence [in the 1950s], the government of Sudan hasn’t given anything to the people of Darfur – the people were asking for education and other things, and the government didn’t want us to ask for these things, so they are killing us.” Another observed, “Africans from the area told the Sudanese government, we want our rights (development, education). So the Sudanese government decided to kill everyone to get rid of the headache.” A third simply said, “We don’t have schools, hospitals or other things. The government said we don’t deserve things.”

The interviews highlighted the cultural aspect of the “us” versus “them” conflict – even though both groups are Muslim. “I think this happened to Darfur because we are all Black Africans or [because of] African culture. They killed people inside the Mosque and even destroyed the Mosque.” Another refugee remembered, “When the new Islamic government came to power in Sudan in the early 1990s, they prepared Arab tribes to kill African tribes in western Sudan. All the Arab countries gave Sudan money, weapons, and support to kill African tribes – the government of Sudan wants to kill Darfurians and replace them with Arabs.” This refugee noted that the government targeted the Zaghawa, Masalit, and Fur tribes.

The second element in the genocidal pattern is the arming of the Arab Janjaweed militias. Arms have poured into Darfur since at least the famine of the mid-1980s, and the Sudanese government began distributing weapons to Arab groups in Darfur in the 1990s. “For approximately 13 years,” one of the respondents in the ADS reported, “the government has had a policy of arming Arabs and giving them horses to attack the villages of Darfur.”

Another reasoned, “I know it’s the government because otherwise how would they [the Arab attacking groups] have the Antonovs [planes], the helicopters, and the troops.” This logic led many to conclude that “the government does not want Blacks to live in Darfur because they give Arabs weapons to attack us.” Even more specifically, a refugee remarked, “It is a farmer versus nomad issue. . . . The Sudanese government has armed the Janjaweed and told them to get rid of all the Black people in Darfur.” A local leader reported, “The Janjaweed said that the President of Sudan offered them weapons and ordered them to go and attack and ‘yemseho’ (clean) Darfur of the dirty slaves in order to establish the beginning of the Arab union.” An interviewer summarized the view of one refugee that “the government gives them the weapons and it’s all political.”

The third element is the Sudanese government bombing of African villages. Russian-built Antonov aircraft and helicopters bomb and strafe the villages. Sometimes, these attacks terrify the African villagers into

DARFUR CRIME SCENES

7

submission before ground attacks begin; at other times, the bombings coincide with ground attacks lasting days, weeks, and even months. “All I knew,” a refugee explained, “was that the Antonovs were bombing. . . . It was like a bad dream.” These attacks were often indiscriminate: “I don’t know, but they wanted to kill me and anyone in Tine. . . . I saw daily, up to four times a day, the Antonov bombers.” The result was the large-scale loss of life. One respondent reported that “118 people were killed in his village; . . . his brother went deaf from the explosion.” Another refugee blamed President Omar al-Bashir personally, saying, “I left because of Omar. I saw airplanes. They poured fire on us. He brought fire from the sky and we ran away.”

The ground attacks are the fourth element in the pattern of the genocidal violence in Darfur. The Sudanese government soldiers often join Janjaweed charges into the villages on horses and camels. They storm the villages in armed land cruisers, pickup trucks, tanks, and cars. Sometimes, refugees report government and Janjaweed forces attacking separately, but they more often describe joint ground attacks, as in this account:

The Arabs chased us. The horse riders and camel riders and military cars came and frightened the people, shouting here and there. The aircraft came and bombed our village and the people ran away from fear. They bombed even the men and the children while they were running away.

The bombing and ground assaults often are coordinated, and when the air and ground attacks coincide, they are more racially charged and violent. We demonstrate this pattern quantitatively in later chapters.

One refugee noted, “When the Arabs come, aircraft also come.” Another observed, “The forces . . . went through the village shooting people, looting, and burning houses.” The nature of this coordination is shown in the following description:

First vehicles attacked the village. After one hour, planes came and bombed; after this military came on camels and horses and began shooting at random. They cut open the stomachs of pregnant women

and split the throats of male fetuses. Bombs from airplanes killed a lot of animals and people. The military took women away. The village was burned and destroyed. They shot at everyone: man, woman, or child.

Some eyewitness descriptions provide even more explicit details about the military hardware used in the attacks, as in the following example:

The village was attacked by the Antonovs, Migs, six helicopters (some black/dark blue, one white, one military green). Helicopters came with vehicles to bomb and shoot guns from the sides. Vehicles and Janjaweed surrounded the village in green and grey vehicles. Small trucks came with the Doskas (guns on top) . . . 30 men in each. Green uniforms. Leader had red stars on shoulders. Took 15 men away. Five girls taken. Village burned. Burned Mosque with minaret on top.

Following this attack, and many others, village members reported killings and injuries as they fled to the Chad refugee camps, as in the following account:

Three boys were caught and slaughtered. Their throats were cut, a foot was cut open from the big toe to the ankle, hands were cut off, brains removed, sexual organs cut off. Boys were five, six, and seven. . . . The seven-year-old's stomach was slit open and his clothes were torn off. A man who tried to return to the village was caught and killed. His skin was removed. Found his body. . . . Man traveling with him was killed. Shot in head and side.

The interviews include exact names and ages of victims and vivid descriptions of the attacks. We substitute pseudonyms for victims' names and suppress some factual details to protect identities.

The violence is obviously important in its own right, but it is equally important to note the explicitly racial form of these rampages that target members of Black tribes. This is the fifth element in the genocidal patterning of events in Darfur. These sprees of violence are racially animated. In the heat of the attacks, perpetrators often shout racial epithets

DARFUR CRIME SCENES

9

that are both dehumanizing and degrading. We include only a few examples of the racial epithets heard in the attacks:

- They called her Nuba (a derogatory terms for Blacks) dog, son of dogs, and we came here to kill you and your kids.
- You donkey, you slave, we must get rid of you.
- We kill our cows when they have Black calves – we will kill you too.
- All the people in the village are slaves, you make this area dirty, we are here to clean the area.
- Black prostitute, whore, you are dirty – Black.

We analyze the dehumanizing roles of these racial curses and slurs as important motivating and intentional elements of the genocide in this and in following chapters.

The ADS documents sexual violence as well as other kinds of victimization, and this is a sixth crucial element in the scenarios of genocide in Darfur. Jan Pfundheller, drawing from her experience at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, led this part of the fieldwork. She tells the story of gaining the confidence of a sheikh in one of the refugee camps who arranged for her to meet with a group of women rape victims. She planned a time and location that allowed for some privacy, near a wadi (i.e., a river bed) and close to the refugee camp. Over a small rise, the women could be seen walking toward the meeting place in their colorful clothing in a long, almost procession-like fashion. She reports, “They came and they came.” There were almost 300; more than seventy women sat in an inner circle, indicating their willingness to speak. All reported sexual assaults.

Sexually victimized women in Arab cultures rarely marry, and if they are already married, they are at high risk of losing their husbands after they are attacked. Pfundheller approached the interviews with special care, knowing that rape was a source of stigma and dishonor in Muslim society. Yet, these women spoke forcefully of their experiences – often graphically and in disturbing detail. Pfundheller told the women that an important U.S. government leader, Colin Powell, had visited Sudan and

wanted to know more about what had happened to them. Pfundheller said, “I can only promise you that what happened to you will be told to my government, and then perhaps to the world.”

These women told horrifying stories. Some were abducted, raped, and told they were now the wives of Arabs and would bear Arab babies. Some attackers spoke of distinguishing Arabs from Black Africans by skin tone (i.e., Arabs are often said to have a redder skin color), telling the women that subtle differences in skin tone would signify the identity of the children resulting from these coerced pregnancies. One woman in the ADS interviews reported hearing, “We will kill all men and rape the women. We want to change the color. Every woman will deliver red. Arabs are the husbands of those women.”

Aisha, another of the young women interviewed, offered this horrifying account:

A soldier took my baby son and said, “I will kill him.” I told the soldier, “You killed my husband; don’t kill my boy.” One other said, “Don’t kill the baby.”... I was knocked down, and the first soldier had sex with me from the front. They were saying the government from Khartoum sent [them]... Ten soldiers raped me and left me. I was bleeding and could not walk. They did this to me for nearly three hours... A man fleeing from another village found me and took me and my children to Masteri.

We describe later the conditions in the town of Masteri from where this woman fled before crossing the border to Chad.

Attackers killed the women they raped in Rwanda, whereas in Darfur, they often returned raped women to their villages or camps. This practice intensified the terror and dishonor of the sexual violation, as these raped women became living symbols of stigma and subordination. Jan Pfundheller emphasized that “as a tool of terror, killing your men and raping your women seemed effective. If you have women without men to make a family, it changes the face of their society.” Men in our interviews were victimized sexually as well. Brent Pfundheller,