

The Translator (2008) by Daoud Hari



Photograph of Daoud Hari, author of *The Translator*.

Daoud Hari's first memoir, *The Translator*, is a work of nonfiction which functions equally as a history lesson, an eye-witness account, and a warning about the dangers of man. It is a moving and heartbreaking description of the atrocities taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan and an exploration of empathy, humanity, and kindness.

Daoud Hari (19?? - present)

Biography

Born Daoud Ibarahaem Hari, Hari is a Sudanese tribesman from the Darfur region of Sudan. He has worked as a language interpreter and guide for NGOs and the press on fact-finding trips into the war-torn and dangerous Darfur area. Hari was captured and detained by the government of Sudan as a spy in August 2006 along with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Paul Salopek and their Chadian driver Abdulraham Anu (aka "Ali"). During their months-long ordeal all three men were severely beaten and deprived. The American journalist knew that the Sudanese government did not want to risk more bad publicity on his death and so eventually all three were released. Upon their successful release - after an international outcry from US diplomats, the US military, Bono and even the Pope - Hari moved to the US where he began work on his memoirs to help bring further world attention to the plight of his people and country. In 2008 he published his memoirs under the title *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur*. By telling his story he hopes someone will listen and send help to his people so eventually they can move back to their land and live a peaceful life.

Daoud Hari is also known as Suleyman Abakar Moussa. As he explains in his memoir, this is a false identity he created to appear as a citizen of Chad in order that he might work in the Sudanese refugee camps in Chad as an interpreter (by Chad law, only Chadian citizens are allowed to work).

Memoirs and Memoirists

A **memoir** is a genre of literary nonfiction which recounts a collection of memories and life events pertaining to the author's life; these retellings are understood to be factual. A memoir differs from a biography or autobiography in that the former is the retelling of an entire life, while the latter is the retelling of moments or stories from a life. Memoirs often read as a story, as opposed to the often formal, cold, informational tone of other genres of nonfiction. Famous memoirs include Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Daoud Hari is considered a memoirist, as *The Translator* recounts a series of events taking place in Hari's life during the years of the conflict in Darfur. Instead of detailing all of the years of his life, Hari chooses to focus on moments which help to capture the devastation and destitution present within the Darfur area of Sudan beginning around 2003 and continuing to the present day. Rife with harrowing visual imagery and the frank, candid discussion of unjust death of thousands, Hari's memoir calls to mind other works of nonfiction from Africa, such as Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Benjamin Ajak, Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Judy A. Bernstein's collected efforts in *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan*, and Phillip Gourevitch's collection of stories, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*.

Humanitarian Crises

Humanitarian crises are events that are threatening to communities or cultures in terms of health, safety, or well-being. These may be internal or external conflicts, and they usually occur throughout a large land area. Often, international response is necessary to ensure the safety and survival of the victims.

Examples of humanitarian crises include armed conflicts (Darfur, Rwanda), epidemics (Ebola outbreak), famine (Somalia), and natural disasters (major tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.).

Historical Context

Geography of Sudan

Sudan, the third largest nation in Africa is located south of Egypt, bordering the Red Sea. In addition to these more well-known boundaries, Sudan also borders Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Chad and Libya. The Nile River divides the country into east and west. At 728,215 square miles, Sudan is roughly the size of America's Midwest.

The Darfur Conflict

In 2003, two Darfuri rebel movements- the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) - took up arms against the Sudanese government, complaining about the marginalization of the area and the failure to protect sedentary people from attacks by nomads. The government of Sudan responded by unleashing Arab militias known as Janjaweed, or "devils on horseback." Sudanese forces and Janjaweed militia attacked hundreds of villages throughout Darfur. Over 400 villages were completely destroyed and millions of civilians were forced to flee their homes.

In the ongoing genocide, African farmers and others in Darfur are being systematically displaced and murdered at the hands of the Janjaweed. The genocide in Darfur has claimed 400,000 lives and displaced over 2,500,000 people. More than one hundred people continue to die each day; five thousand die every month. The Sudanese government disputes these estimates and denies any connection with the Janjaweed.



The Sudanese government appears unwilling to address the human rights crisis in the region and has not taken the necessary steps to restrict the activities of the Janjaweed. In June 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) took the first step in ending impunity in Darfur by launching investigations into human rights violations in

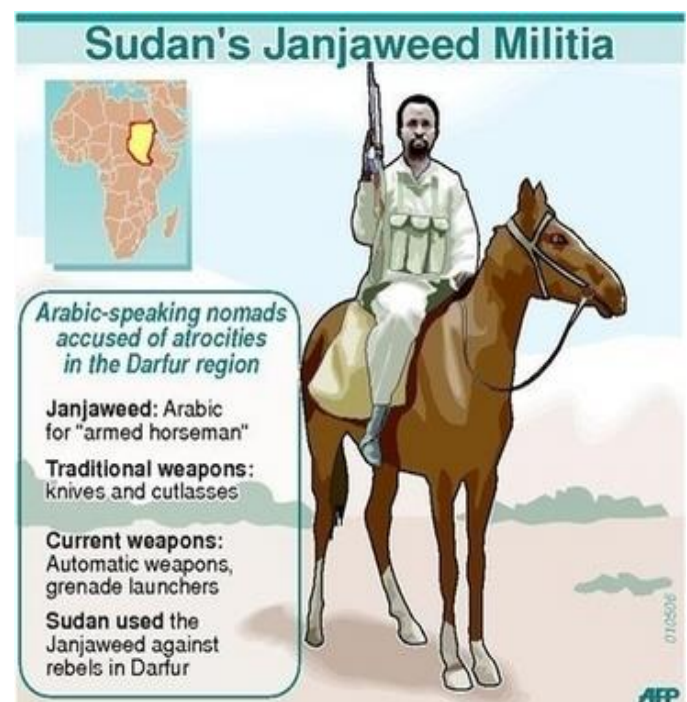
The central and north of Sudan are comprised of extremely dry deserts, the Nubian and the Bayuda, while in the south there are many swamps and dense rainforests. In semi-dry regions in the north and northwest, many people resort to a nomadic lifestyle in order to survive during the dry months, following the scant amounts of rain with their herds of camel and sheep.

Darfur, Hari's homeland, lies in the western region of the country, bordering Chad, and is roughly the size of Spain.

Darfur. However, the government of Sudan refused to cooperate with the investigations.

On March 4, 2009 Sudanese President Omar al Bashir, became the first sitting president to be indicted by the ICC for directing a campaign of mass killing, rape, and pillage against civilians in Darfur. The arrest warrant for Bashir follows arrest warrants issued by the ICC for former Sudanese Minister of State for the Interior Ahmad Harun and Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb. The government of Sudan has not surrendered either suspect to the ICC.

Darfuris today continue to suffer and the innumerable problems facing Sudan cannot be resolved until peace is secured in Darfur. According to UN estimates, 2.7 million Darfuris remain in internally displaced persons camps and over 4.7 million Darfuris rely on humanitarian aid. Resolving the Darfur conflict is critical not just for the people of Darfur, but also for the future of Sudan and the stability of the entire region.



Sources:

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"Genocide in Darfur." United Human Rights Council. np., n.d. Web. 23 Sept. 2015.