

# **Evolution of the Darfur Rebellion – A Revolution in the Making**

**By Savo Heleta\***

October 2008

Written for "Violence Studies" class  
Mphil Conflict Transformation and Management  
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa

## **Introduction**

In 2003, a conflict broke out in Sudan's western province of Darfur between the mainly "African" rebels and the government forces and their proxy "Arab" militias. It is estimated that about 200,000 people have so far died in the conflict from fighting, disease, and starvation. The UN and aid agencies estimate that over two million Darfurians, out of the population of about six million, are living in refugee camps (BBC Online, 6 September 2007). Even though the majority of all deaths in Darfur occurred in 2003 and 2004 (Natsios 2008), the conflict is nowhere near the end.

Various actors define Darfur rebel movements differently. The government of Sudan labels them as "bandits" and the conflict in Darfur as "tribal warfare" (International Crisis Group 2004: 2). Members of the Darfur movements see themselves as revolutionaries (Sudan Tribune, June 30 2006; Flint and de Waal 2008: xi) who are trying to end decades of marginalization. The international community and the media call them rebels.

This paper will discuss the conflict in Darfur and argue that there is currently more going on than just a rebellion. While many typical rebel movements operate today in Darfur, changing patterns in the conflict have led the Justice and Equality Movement, one of the two original Darfur rebel movements, to amend its strategies and aims and become a revolutionary movement with a goal to take over power in Sudan and make profound and fundamental changes in the country.

This study will show how the economic, social, and political marginalization of Darfur, together with the political manipulation of racial, ethnic, and tribal roots, led Darfurians to organize and start a rebellion against the central government in 2003. The author will discuss how the counter-insurgency by the government forces and militias helped the rebels gain support in Darfur and abroad, as well as the international community's response to the conflict. The paper will show how the patterns in the conflict have changed over time and how the Justice and Equality Movement evolved into a revolutionary movement.

## **Revolution, Rebellion, and Counter-Insurgency**

This part of the paper will look at definitions and characteristics of revolution, the

---

\* Savo Heleta is a postgraduate student in Conflict Transformation and Management at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He is the author of *Not My Turn to Die: Memoirs of a Broken Childhood in Bosnia* (March 2008, AMACOM Books, New York). Visit [www.savohelata.com](http://www.savohelata.com) for more info. Savo can be reached at [savo@savohelata.com](mailto:savo@savohelata.com).

difference between revolution and rebellion, causes of mass unrest, rebellion, and revolution, and counter-insurgency.

Definitions of "revolution" differ from one theorist to another and are widely debated. The modern concept of revolution originated during the French revolution of the eighteenth century, giving an example to the world that "a nation's people, by concentrated political struggle, could fundamentally transform the political order that governs their lives and, with it, the social and economic structure of society" (Gurr and Goldstone 1991: 324).

Some argue that "true revolutions" represent "the downfall of a dominant social class" after large uprisings, giving examples of the French, Chinese, and Russian revolutions. Others believe that "any sudden replacement of one type of regime by another type" is a revolution (Katz 2001: 5). Robertson (quoted in Calvert 1990: 3) defines revolution as a "violent and total change in a political system, which not only vastly alters the distribution of power in the society, but results in major changes in the whole social structure." Katz (2001: 5) argues that revolutions involve "downfall of an old regime through violent means and replacement by a new regime that attempts to establish a new political and socioeconomic order." Welch and Taintor (1972: 2) write that revolutions involve "tearing down of existing political institutions and building them anew on different foundations."

Four characteristics common to all types of revolution are: 1) revolutions are sudden, 2) violent, 3) require political replacement of one ruling group by another, and 4) there must be some major political and/or socio-economic change to the system. Revolutions can only be determined after they happen and the revolutionary movements seize power and make substantial political and/or socio-economic changes in their societies (Calvert 1990: 15-16).

Revolutionary movements are groups that "seek to bring about a revolution [overthrow the ruling regime and take power] but have not yet done so" (Katz 2001: 5-6). Revolutionary warfare is defined as a campaign of violence by a political movement representing an alternative to a current regime. Movements fighting revolutionary warfare "mobilize a sufficient segment of the masses" to threaten the regime in power (Sederberg 1994: 52). Schutz and Slater (1990: 3) argue that revolutionary movements "tend to be motivated by a common perception of regime illegitimacy." Johnson (quoted in Sederberg 1994: 159) believes that participants in revolutionary movements decide to use violence "in order to cause the system to change when all else has failed."

According to the *1998 Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, it is hard to distinguish between a political revolution and a rebellion. Some argue that the term "revolution" should be used only in cases when victorious revolutionary movements make fundamental changes in the social structure of the society. Rebellions are seen as "more limited political upheavals involving only the replacement of one ruling group by another. On this criterion, rebellions clearly shade into revolutions, depending upon one's judgment as to the scope and intensity of the social changes that follow the seizure of power." Russell (1974: 56) defines rebellion as a violent struggle that threatens to seize power through violence and fighting. According to Weede and Muller (1998: 49), a rebellion can become a revolution if the rebels succeed in overthrowing the ruling regime and substantially changing the system.

When a government fails to fulfill the essential requirements to its citizens, the doors are open for a mass upheaval and rebellion by the excluded part of the society (Calvert 1990: 65). Gurr and Goldstone (1991: 334) note that a widely shared sense of grievance among people is a necessary condition in a mass mobilization and rebellion. Welch and Taintor (1972: 6) offer four preconditions that may lead to a mass unrest, rebellion, or revolution:

- A widespread sense of disappointment with the conditions of life (relative deprivation);
- focusing the feelings of disappointment upon political institutions;
- vacillation, incompetence, and incoherence of political leadership through resistance to reform or through injudicious use of force;
- combination of economic and political feelings of deprivation with the acceptance of a myth or ideology of change.

Moshiri (1991: 20) defines relative deprivation as "a perceived discrepancy between people's value expectations and their value capabilities." The theory of relative deprivation states that the perception of relative deprivation "leads to discontent, which tends to lead to politicization of discontent, which tends to lead to political violence" (Gurr 1970: 12-13). According to the relative deprivation argument (Nkemdirim 1977: 76),

The hardships which individuals collectively endure in the form of stress, uprooting, land alienation, hunger, poverty, anxiety, frustration, and anger are due to the impact of large-scale structural changes. Hardships are seen as an immediate, ultimate, and direct spur to collective violence against an oppressive government.

Every insurgency, rebellion, or revolution provokes a response from the governments that the revolutionary or rebel movements are trying to overthrow. Walt (2001: 37) argues that successful revolutions occur rarely due to the fact that "even weak states usually control far greater resources than their internal opponents." On the other hand, violence and severe coercion used in counter-insurgency actions often lead to decline in political support for the regime, especially in the areas where fighting is occurring (Sederberg 1994: 293). This often helps revolutionary and rebel movements to attract more support from victimized communities. Halliday (1999: 225) adds that counter-insurgencies that last long often "alienate significant constituencies within the society," and influence other countries to oppose them.

Counter-insurgency can take a number of forms. Some governments use regular army to topple the insurgents. Other states prefer counter-insurgency by "indirect means" – through providing arms, equipment, financial support, training, and other assistance to paramilitary groups fighting the insurgents (Katz 2001: 114-15). Some governments try to destabilize the revolutionary/rebel movements and their leadership. Gurr and Goldstone (1991: 337) write that many revolutions fail due to factionalism and leadership struggle within the movements.

Success of revolutionary and rebel movements depends on factors such as the emergence of a broad coalition of forces that challenge the ruling regime, balance of military power, internal solidarity, support from the masses, financing, and international support (Gurr and Goldstone 1991: 336; Weede and Muller 1998: 55). Gurr and Goldstone (1991: 340) emphasize the fact that the international community's pressures and involvement are crucial in "shaping the revolutionary process and its outcomes."

## **The Roots of the Darfur Rebellion**

This part of the paper will show how the social, economic, and political marginalization of the Darfur region, together with the political manipulation of racial, ethnic, and tribal roots, led to the rebellion that broke out in 2003.

Darfur was an independent kingdom and a political entity since the fourteenth century (Prunier 2005: 2). In the seventeenth century, with the arrival of Arabs, Islam became

the main religion in Darfur (de Waal 2004a). By 1800, Darfur was the most powerful state in the region (Miller 2007: 113).

Sudan became a country at the Congress of Berlin in 1886, where the European colonial powers decided the fate of Africa. Since 1899, Sudan was ruled by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (El Mahdi 1965: 121). Darfur became a part of the British-Egyptian controlled Sudan only in 1916, when the Condominium annexed the independent Darfur sultanate and incorporated it in Sudan's borders (O'Fahey and Spaulding 1974: 186).

From its annexation, the Darfur region was "completely neglected" by the Condominium authorities in the economic, social, and political terms (de Waal 2004; Prunier 2006: 195). Alex de Waal (2004a) notes that the "incorporation of Darfur into Sudan led not only to the economic and political marginalization, but the near-total neglect of Darfur's unique history and identity." Prunier (2005: 32) stresses that social and economic underdevelopment in Darfur "contained the seeds of future conflicts."

When Sudan became independent in 1956, the new government continued to marginalize Darfur (Miller 2007: 127). De Waal (2004b) notes that Sudan's central governments always ignored Darfur's people. Since independence, Darfur has "received less education, healthcare, development assistance, and fewer government posts than any other region" in Sudan.

The population of the Darfur province consisted of many tribes that distinguished themselves as ethnically and culturally "Arab" or "African." In many cases, the way of life determined people's belonging to one group or the other. Herders were considered to be "Arabs" while "Africans" were farmers (Prunier 2005: 5). De Waal (2004) writes that "discernible racial or religious differences between 'Africans' and 'Arabs'" in Darfur never existed. All people in Darfur are black, Muslim, followers of Sunni Islam, and they for centuries lived in relative peace" (Baldo 2006).

The political situation in the post-independence Sudan, where a long civil war was fought between the "Arab" north and the "African," both Christian and animist south, began politicizing Darfur's tribes (Prunier 2005: 46). Sudanese governments saw Darfurians as a "major constituency of devout Muslims that could be mobilized" to fight against the southerners (de Waal 2004a), and the Darfur province supplied the highest number of soldiers who fought on the "Arab" side against the "African" south (Prunier 2005: 78). At the same time, the Islamists who ruled Sudan completely neglected Darfur "in the series of Islamist projects aimed at social transformation" (de Waal 2004a).

Following droughts and famines in the 1980s, conflict erupted between various groups in Darfur over the scarce natural resources (de Waal 2004; Miller 2007: 120). After their livestock was destroyed in the famines, Darfur herders (Arabs) had to choose whether to maintain their way of life or take up farming. Either route led to clashes with farmers (Africans) and both sides soon began arming themselves to defend their interests (Mamdani 2007). The UN Environmental Program report notes that Darfur is a "tragic example of the social breakdown that can result from ecological collapse" (Seattle Times, 22 July 2007).

In the mid-1980s, Khartoum began introducing "policies that manipulated ethnicity in the interests of central politicians and their provincial allies" (International Crisis Group, 2004: 4). Gerard Prunier (2005: 47) writes that a "rapidly degrading ecological situation helped polarize politically manipulated ethnic identities." Miller (2007: 121) believes that "Arab-African" classifications that for decades had "served primarily administrative purposes became more rigid during the period of famines and eventually served as the locus for a broader war." De Waal (2004a) writes that "Darfur's complex identities have been radically and traumatically simplified [in the twentieth century], creating a polarized 'Arab versus African' dichotomy that is historically bogus, but disturbingly powerful."

In 1994, Sudan's central government decided to split Darfur province into three states, thus dividing the Fur, who are the largest group in Darfur and the largest "African" tribe, and making them a minority in each state. This move was intended to reduce the influence of the Fur and help Darfur "Arabs" take control of the province (Jooma 2006: 5; Flint and de Waal 2008: 20). A report by the International Crisis Group (2004: 5) notes that "manipulation of the ethnic fabric gradually produced an alarming shift in the nature of conflict, with ethnicity becoming a major mobilizing factor."

In May 2000, Darfur Islamists published the "Black Book" in which they explained the "region's systematic under-representation in national governments" of post-independence Sudan. The book "condemned the Islamist promise to Darfur as a sham" and created the ground for the rebellion against the government (de Waal 2004).

As stressed earlier, when a government fails to fulfill the essential requirements to its citizens, the doors are open for a mass upheaval and rebellion by the excluded parts of the society. In 2003, two loosely connected movements, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), began attacking government forces in Darfur. Both groups listed political, economic and social marginalization of the region as the main causes of rebellion (Baldo 2006). The Darfur rebels came from predominantly "African" sedentary ethnic groups Fur, Zaghawa and Massalit (International Crisis Group 2006). The SLM, seen as a secularist group, was backed by the Fur, the largest ethnic group in Darfur, and some members of the Zaghawa and Masalit groups. The JEM, seen as an Islamic movement and backed by the Zaghawa, was founded by the Darfur Islamists, many of whom held government posts in the past but broke their relations with the Sudanese government when they realized that the government was not going to invest in Darfur's development and care about the wellbeing of its inhabitants (de Waal 2004; Prunier 2005: 121-122; International Crisis Group 2007).

The rebel claims about marginalization of Darfur came as the southern and northern Sudanese politicians began negotiations to end the latest south-north civil war that began in 1983 and claimed over 2 million lives (Prunier 2005: 89). After three years of negotiations, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Sudanese government and the southerners in January 2005. The agreement gave autonomy to the southern region and promised a referendum on self-determination in 2011. The CPA included "power and wealth sharing arrangements aimed at ending decades of political and economic marginalization of the south" (International Crisis Group 2006a: ii), with half of the revenues from oil produced in southern Sudan going to the southern regional government (Human Rights Watch 2006).

Prunier (2005: 163) asserts that the Darfur rebellion has been "indirectly provoked" by the negotiations between the government and the south. Darfurians felt excluded from the power and revenue-sharing agreement and wanted to pressure the government to negotiate a similar agreement in Darfur and share the wealth with the region (El-Tigani Mahmoud 2004: 6; Clough 2005: 3). The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005: 23) established that the peace negotiations between the government and the south "did in some way represent an example to be followed by other groups, since armed struggle would apparently lead to fruitful negotiations with the government."

## **Counter-Insurgency in Darfur**

This part of the paper will discuss the reaction to the rebellion in Darfur by the government of Sudan. The rebels began their attacks on the government and army posts in early 2003. Some of the major attacks were on military bases and airports in Darfur, where rebels killed hundreds of soldiers (Prunier 2005: 95-96).

In response to the rebellion, the Sudanese government mobilized and armed local militias from Darfur's "Arab" ethnic groups, called Janjaweed, particularly those without traditional land rights, to fight against the "African" rebels (Prunier 2005: 98; International Crisis Group 2007). One of the reasons for this was the fact that a large part of the army was needed in southern Sudan at the time. Also, a significant part of the army was made up of recruits from Darfur and they were "not considered trustworthy" to be used in the Darfur conflict (Prunier 2005: 97). The army supplied the Janjaweed with weapons and equipment and supported their attacks on the rebels and civilians with military intelligence and air bombings.

Prunier (2006) argues that the armed rebellion was "the ultimate threat" for the Khartoum government - "a revolt of its Muslim margins. It had to be dealt with once and for all with the utmost violence." Slim (2004: 822) believes that the government decided to respond to the rebellion in full force because many members of the government "feared that Darfur insurgency had the potential to become the vanguard for a widespread northern movement for regime change that could easily unravel" the government. From the government's point of view, the counter-insurgency in Darfur was "rational," since the rebellion threatened its existence and had a potential of spreading to the rest of the country (Prunier 2005: 105). Ghazi Suleiman, a Sudanese human rights lawyer, believes that the conflict in Darfur is a battle for power over Khartoum, which explains "why the government hit back so hard" (Washington Post, April 23 2006). Alex de Waal (2004b) describes what he calls the "counter-insurgency on the cheap" used in Darfur by the government of Sudan:

Faced with a revolt that outran the capacity of the country's tired and overstretched army, [the government] knew exactly what to do. Several times during the war in the south they had mounted counter-insurgency on the cheap - famine and scorched earth their weapons of choice... Each time, they sought out a local militia, provided it with supplies and armaments, and declared the area of operations an ethics-free zone.

The counter-insurgency was often carried out "with completely inadequate means" (Prunier 2005: 154), causing an estimated 200,000 deaths, millions of displaced, and nearly total destruction of communities in Darfur. The response by the government forces and "Arab" militias frequently went "beyond the separation and interdiction doctrines of measured counter-insurgency" (Slim 2004: 814). Kajee (2006) writes that the army and its proxies launched many attacks against civilians with an intention to "cut the rebels off from their civilian supporters." Consequently, the cruelty and bloodshed have helped the rebels recruit scores of people among the Darfur population (Baldo 2006; Flint and de Waal 2008: 150).

## **International Community's Response to the Conflict**

This part of the paper will examine the international community's response to the conflict in Darfur. Understanding that the international community's involvement and pressures on the regime are crucial for their success, the rebels, and especially the Justice and Equality Movement, have used "the western public's revulsion at the atrocities in Darfur to portray the conflict as genocide," thus hoping to delegitimize the government in the eyes of the international community and foster regime change (Flint and de Waal 2008: 101). The rebels have largely succeeded in labeling the conflict as "genocide" in the eyes of the Western world. In September 2004, then US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, used the term "genocide" to describe the conflict in Darfur (Prunier 2005: 140). Since then, many politicians, humanitarians, journalists, and celebrities have used the same label.

Throughout the conflict, the Western media and activist groups have presented the

conflict in Darfur as a war between "Arabs" and "Africans," with Arab militias carrying out genocide, massacres, rape and pillage of innocent Africans with the support of the Sudan's government. This "simplifies and misrepresents" a very complex conflict and it has "led to demonization of all Arabs" (O'Fahey 2004: 24; Flint and de Waal 2008: 186). The media and activists have completely ignored the suffering of many Arabs in the hands of the rebels, write Flint and de Waal (2008: 187), noting that "the first coverage of the Arab victims of the war by a major newspaper [in the West] was in 2006, fully three years after the war began."

Even though the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (2005: 3) established that the government of Sudan and the "Arab" militias have not committed genocide but were responsible for "serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law," many Western governments, media, and activists claim that the Sudanese government has committed and is still committing genocide in Darfur. Straus (2005) argues that the debate in the West, instead of being focused on how to stop the crisis and human suffering in Darfur, is only about "whether or not it should be called 'genocide' under the terms of the Genocide Convention."

Flint and de Waal (2008: 182) write that, apart from the humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced people and readiness "to condemn human rights violations in very strong terms," the international community was not willing to do anything else in Darfur. An example of this is the lack of helicopters for the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). For over a year now, the UN, African Union, and aid groups have numerous times asked the international community to provide the UNAMID with six attack helicopters and eighteen transport helicopters so they can start protecting civilians in Darfur. Helicopters are essential for any success of the mission in the vast and remote region the size of France. To this day, no country has supplied even one helicopter for the Darfur mission (allAfrica.com, July 31 2008).

Many argue that labeling the conflict as "genocide" has only made things worse on the ground. It convinced the rebels that they "don't need to negotiate with the government," hoping the international community would eventually intervene. The government of Sudan has also used the label to "market itself in the Middle East as another victim of America's anti-Arab and anti-Islamic policies" (Washington Post, April 23 2006).

Self-interests of powerful countries, such as the American cooperation with the Sudanese government in its "war on terror" and the Chinese investments in Sudan's oil industry "have added to the difficulty in resolving the conflict" (International Crisis Group 2007: i). In order to safeguard their interests, these and other countries often "turn a blind eye to Khartoum's continued assault on its own population" (New Statesman, May 20 2008).

## **Changing Patterns in the Conflict – From a Rebel to a Revolutionary Movement**

This part of the paper will examine changing patterns in the Darfur conflict and the emergence of a revolutionary movement. In 2006, the Sudanese government and one faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), while another SLM faction and the Justice and Equality Movement refused to sign it. Signing of the DPA, instead of bringing peace, only intensified fighting and deteriorated the humanitarian situation in Darfur (Nathan 2007; Human Rights Watch 2007; International Crisis Group 2007a).

The agreement damaged relationships among the rebel groups and led to leadership struggles and fragmentation along tribal lines. As mentioned above, rebel and revolutionary movements typically have difficulties with factionalism and leadership struggle, and this has also been the case in Darfur. It is estimated that currently there

are over twenty rebel groups in Darfur. According to a BBC report (10 May 2008), "very little, other than the names, is known about the composition, leadership and numbers of the breakaway groups." As the rebels began dividing along tribal lines, "their messages became more fragmented and less representative of constituencies they claim to speak for" (International Crisis Group 2007).

Many analysts blame the Sudanese government and its divide-and-rule tactics for some of the rebels' fragmentation. According to Hanson (2007), since 2005, the Sudanese government has signed many "bilateral deals with lower-level commanders of rebel factions, thus complicating the political process and sowing divisions within rebel groups." International Crisis Group (2007) notes that "divide-and-rule tactics complicate efforts to achieve long-term stability in Darfur, deliberately increase the conflict's tribalization, and contribute directly to the general chaos and lawlessness."

Since the beginning of the rebellion, the aim of the Sudan Liberation Movement was not regime change, but reform of the status quo (Prunier 2005: 122). In 2003, the SLM manifesto declared that the movement's goals were the end of economic and political marginalization of Darfur, a united Sudan, and a secular government (Flint and de Waal 2008: 91). To this day, these main goals have not substantially changed.

Similarly, in the early days of the rebellion, the Justice and Equality Movement claimed it wanted to end the marginalization of Darfur and other impoverished parts of Sudan. The movement's manifesto (in Flint and de Waal 2008: 105), published in 2003, called for:

A unified Sudan; justice and equality in place of social injustice and political tyranny; radical and comprehensive constitutional reform that would guarantee the regions their rights in ruling the country; basic services for every Sudanese, and balanced economic and human development in all regions of the country.

After the Darfur Peace Agreement failed to bring peace and the government failed to deliver any of the provisions it pledged to implement, such as disarmament of the Janjaweed militias, protection of civilians, ceasefire, and deployment of UN/AU troops, the JEM's main aim became regime change (Flint, May 29 2008). In late 2006, the JEM leader said "we cannot bring peace in Darfur unless we change this government" (Flint and de Waal 2008: 244). The JEM leadership believes that the current Sudanese regime is "the main obstacle to finding peace to the whole Sudan problem, not only Darfur" (Voice of America, May 15 2008). The JEM plans to achieve its objectives through a "war against the government in Khartoum with the aim of liberating the entire Sudan and in conjunction with other movements that share common objectives" (JEM, June 2008).

One of the JEM commanders said in a recent interview that the JEM's goal is to "make dramatic changes in Sudan. Power and wealth must be shared equally in all the marginalized areas" (Voice of America, July 7 2008). Tanner and Tubiana (2007: 31) note that the JEM "lays claim to an agenda of radical reform for all Sudan," which essentially means regime change. Prunier (2005: 122) agrees that the change of the central government is perhaps the only way of solving the Darfur conflict and decades of marginalization of Sudan's peripheries.

In the beginning of May 2008, the JEM forces mounted an attack on the Sudanese capital, the first attack by a Darfur rebel group outside Darfur. The attack failed, but showed the JEM's determination to change the regime. Many analysts emphasize "the psychological importance of the attack," adding that this is the first time since independence that the fighting has reached the capital. Even though the JEM's attack on the capital did not succeed, it exposed the "weakness of security in Khartoum and the vulnerability of the regime" (Mohammed 2008; Reuters, 11 May 2008).

Alex de Waal, the leading international expert on Sudan, described the JEM's attack on

the capital as a "bid for power." He added that he believes that other rebel movements in Darfur "don't share that ambition ... they want peace for their places rather than wanting power in Khartoum for themselves" (International Herald Tribune, May 12 2008). In the aftermath of the attack, the JEM's leader, Khalil Ibrahim, said that this was "just a rehearsal for the attacks to come, and we will continue to attack till we change this regime" (Sudan Tribune, May 17 2008). Alex de Waal (2008) believes that the aim of the attack "was nothing less than taking power" and adds that Khalil "seems truly to believe that he can instigate a popular uprising of Sudan's black majority" against the ruling elite in Khartoum.

Analysts say that the JEM's leader possesses grand ambitions and growing military strength. Sharing the same ethnic background as the leadership of neighboring Chad, the JEM has been the main beneficiary of Chadian support for the Darfur rebels. This support has been the main reason the JEM "has become, militarily, the most powerful faction on the ground in Darfur" (Voice of America, May 15 2008).

A few weeks after the JEM launched the attack on the capital, another rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Movement Unity (SLM-Unity), threatened similar attacks. In a statement, the SLM-Unity said it would "work with all revolutionary forces in Darfur to storm the Khartoum regime" and overthrow the government (Reuters, May 26 2008).

Rebellion is an armed struggle against an oppressive regime. Revolutionary movements aim to overthrow a ruling regime, take power, and fundamentally change the system. While many movements in Darfur are typical rebel movements, the Justice and Equality Movement should not be considered a rebel movement any more, but a revolutionary movement with a goal of overthrowing the current regime and fundamentally changing the economic, social, and political system in Sudan. Considering the fact that every post-independence government of Sudan has been ruled by the members of northern tribes which represent only about 5% of the entire population (Flint and de Waal 2008: 17), and have spent the majority of development funds on the northern part of the country, the change proposed in the JEM's manifesto mentioned above would indeed be a profound, fundamental, and revolutionary change.

It is very hard to predict when and how the conflict in Darfur will end. Flint and de Waal (2008: xii) think that it is almost "improbable that there can be a political settlement in Darfur." Jean-Marie Guehenno, UN's peacekeeping chief, claims that the situation in Darfur "has grown infinitely more complex and prospects for peace now seem more remote." He thinks that there is no political will on any side "to abandon the military option, engage in negotiations or fully cooperate with UNAMID and the humanitarian community" (Reuters, 15 May 2008).

Only time will tell if the Justice and Equality Movement will be able to bring about revolutionary change in Sudan. This will depend on many factors, such as the ability to attract support in other parts of the country, cooperation with other rebel movements, finance, military power, international support, and, in the event of their victory, the implementation of substantial political and/or socioeconomic changes in the country.

## **Conclusion**

In 2003, a conflict broke out in Sudan's western province of Darfur between the mainly "African" rebels and the government forces and their proxy "Arab" militias. It is estimated that about 200,000 people have died in the conflict from fighting, disease, and starvation. The UN and aid agencies estimate that over two million Darfurians, out of the population of about six million, are living in refugee camps. Even though the majority of all deaths in Darfur occurred in 2003 and 2004, the conflict is nowhere near the end.

Various actors define Darfur opposition movements differently. The government of Sudan calls them "bandits." Members of the Darfur movements see themselves as revolutionaries who are trying to end decades of marginalization. The international community and the media call them rebels. According to the theoretical definitions, the majority of movements in Darfur are typical rebel movements, while the Justice and Equality Movement have evolved into a revolutionary movement with a goal of taking over power in Sudan and making fundamental changes in the country.

This paper has shown how the economic, social, and political marginalization of Darfur, together with the political manipulation of racial, ethnic, and tribal roots, led Darfurians to organize and start an armed rebellion against the central government in 2003. The author has discussed how the counter-insurgency by the government forces and militias helped the rebels gain support in Darfur and abroad, as well as shaped the international community's response to the conflict.

It is hard to predict how and when the conflict in Darfur will end. Many experts believe that peace through negotiations is now almost impossible due to the lack of political will on all sides to end the conflict and the divisions among the Darfur opposition movements. It is very likely that the conflict will either last for many more years or be ended militarily by either the government of Sudan or the Darfur rebel and revolutionary movements.

Darfur and its people never mattered to the rulers of Sudan, from the British-Egyptian Condominium to the northern Sudanese elites that have ruled the country since independence. Perhaps something radical and revolutionary has to happen at last to change this protracted marginalization. A possible victory by the Darfur rebel and revolutionary movements, the overthrow of the central government, and the implementation of the policies proposed in the JEM's manifesto would indeed be a fundamental and revolutionary change for Darfur and Sudan.

## Reference

- 5 Truths About Darfur. April 23, 2006. Washington Post.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR2006042101752\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/21/AR2006042101752_pf.html)
- Baldo, S. Darfur's peace plan: the view from the ground. 24 May 2006. Open Democracy.  
[http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa\\_democracy/peace\\_darfur\\_3581.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/peace_darfur_3581.jsp)
- Calvert, P. 1990. Revolution and Counter-Revolution. Buckingham. Open University Press.
- Clough, M. 2005. Darfur: Whose Responsibility to Protect? Human Rights Watch.  
<http://www.hrw.org/wr2k5/darfur/1.htm>
- Crisis in Darfur. 2007. International Crisis Group.  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3060&l=1>
- Conflict History: Sudan. International Crisis Group. 2006.  
[http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict\\_search&l=1&t=1&c\\_country=101](http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?action=conflict_search&l=1&t=1&c_country=101)
- Darfur: Revitalizing the Peace Process. International Crisis Group. 30 April 2007a. Africa Report 125. Retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org>
- Darfur peace prospects ever more remote - UN aide. 15 May 2008. Reuters.  
<http://africa.reuters.com/top/news/usnBAN524244.html>
- Darfur Rebel Leader Gains Momentum Despite Dwindling Political Base. May 15, 2008. Voice of America. <http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-05-15-voa59.cfm>
- Darfur rebel leader vows to wear out government forces in long guerrilla war. May 12, 2008. International Herald Tribune.  
<http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2008/05/12/africa/AF-GEN-Sudan.php>
- Darfur rebels threaten Khartoum as peace hopes fade. May 26, 2008. Reuters.  
<http://uk.reuters.com/article/homepageCrisis/idUKL2638557.CH.242020080526>
- Darfur Rebels Threaten New Action Against Sudan Government. July 7 2008. Voice of America.  
<http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-07/Darfur-Rebels-Threaten-New-Action-Against-Sudan-Government.cfm?CFID=40186372&CFTOKEN=85850403>
- Darfur Rising: Sudan's New Crisis. 2004. International Crisis Group. Africa Report N°76. Retrieved from [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)
- de Waal, A. 2004. Tragedy in Darfur. Boston Review. October/November 2004 Issue.  
<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR29.5/dewaal.html>
- de Waal, A. 2004a. Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African Identities, Violence and External Engagement. Social Science Research Council.  
<http://conconflicts.ssrc.org/hornofafrica/dewaal/>
- de Waal, A. 2004b. Counter-Insurgency on the Cheap. London Review of Books.  
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v26/n15/waal01.html>

de Waal, A. Making Sense of Khalil's Putsch. May 13, 2008. Social Science Research Council. <http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/darfur/2008/05/13/making-sense-of-khalils-putsch/>

El Mahdi, M. 1965. A Short History of the Sudan. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

El-Tigani Mahmoud, M. 2004. Inside Darfur: Ethnic Genocide by a Governance Crisis. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Vol. 24.2. Duke University Press. Pp. 3-17. Retrieved from Project MUSE.

FACTBOX-What next after rebel attack on Sudan's capital? 11 May 2008. Reuters. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L1179120.htm>

Flint, J. Interview: THE ROAD TO OMDURMAN. May 29 2008. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/analysis/details.php?content=2008-05-29>

Flint, J. and de Waal, A. 2008. Darfur: A New History of a Long War. London. Zed Books.

Gurr, T. R. 1970. Why Men Rebel. Princeton. Princeton University Press.

Gurr, T.R. and Goldstone, J.A. 1991. Comparisons and Policy Implications. In Gurr, T.R., Goldstone, J.A., and Moshiri, F. (Ed.). Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century. Boulder. Westview Press, Inc. Pp. 324-352.

Halliday, F. 1999. Revolutions and World Politics: The rise and fall of the sixth great power. New York. Palgrave.

Hanson, S. Negotiating Peace in Darfur. 25 April 2007. Council on Foreign Relations. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/13171/negotiating\\_peace\\_in\\_darfur.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/13171/negotiating_peace_in_darfur.html)

How much is ecology to blame for Darfur crisis? 22 July 2007. Seattle Times. [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2003800514\\_darfur22.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2003800514_darfur22.html)

INTERVIEW: Darfur JEM chief determined on regime change; rejects ceasefire. May 17, 2008. Sudan Tribune. <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article27189>

Jooma, M. 2006. Darfur and the Battle for Khartoum. Institute for Security Studies. Retrieved from [www.darfurcentre.ch](http://www.darfurcentre.ch).

Kajee, A. 2006. Darfur Stereotyping Fraught with Danger. Africa Report No.81. Institute of War and Peace. Retrieved from: <http://www.saiia.org.za/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=997>

Katz, M. 2001. Revolution: International Dimensions. Washington, DC. CQ Press.

Mamdani, M. 4 June 2007. Mahmood Mamdani on Darfur: "The Politics of Naming: Genocide, Civil War, Insurgency." Democracy Now. [http://www.democracynow.org/2007/6/4/mahmood\\_mamdani\\_on\\_darfur\\_the\\_politics](http://www.democracynow.org/2007/6/4/mahmood_mamdani_on_darfur_the_politics)

Miller, M. 2007. The Crisis in Darfur. Mediterranean Quarterly. Vol. 18.4. Pp. 112-130. Retrieved from Project MUSE.

Mohammed, H. May 16 2008. Attack on Khartoum: The Ramifications for Sudan. The Social Science Research Council. <http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/darfur/2008/05/16/attack-on-khartoum-the-ramifications-for-sudan/>

- Moshiri, F. 1991. Revolutionary Conflict Theory in an Evolutionary Perspective. In Gurr, T.R., Goldstone, J.A., and Moshiri, F. (Ed.). Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century. Boulder. Westview Press, Inc. Pp. 4-36.
- Nathan, L. Long road to peace in Darfur. 8 August 2007. Pambazuka News. Published by Fahamu - Networks For Social Justice.  
<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/42960>
- National Redemption Front: Founding Declaration. June 30, 2006. Sudan Tribune.  
<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article16455>
- Natsios, A. Beyond Darfur – Sudan’s Slide Toward Civil War. May/June 2008. Foreign Affairs.  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20080501faessay87306/andrew-s-natsios/beyond-darfur.html?mode=print>
- Nkemdirim, B. 1977. Reflections on Political Conflict, Rebellion, and Revolution in Africa. The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1. Pp. 75-90. Retrieved from JSTOR.
- O’Fahey, R. S. and Spaulding, J. L. 1974. Kingdoms of the Sudan. London. Methuen & CO LTD.
- O’Fahey, R. S. 2004. Conflict in Darfur: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. In Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur. University for Peace. Retrieved from [www.upeace.org](http://www.upeace.org)
- Proposal for Change: Towards a Sudan of Justice and Equality. JEM Training and Planning Office. June 2008. Retrieved from [www.cmi.no](http://www.cmi.no)
- Prunier, G. 2005. Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide. New York. Cornell University Press.
- Prunier, G. 2006. The Politics of Death in Darfur. Current History. May 2006 Issue. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.
- Q&A: Sudan's Darfur conflict. 6 September 2007. BBC Online.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/3496731.stm>
- Rebellion. Dictionary of Sociology 1998. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-rebellion.html>
- Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General. 25 January 2005. Retrieved from the United Nations website.  
[www.un.org](http://www.un.org)
- Russell, D. 1974. Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force. New York. Academic Press, Inc.
- Schutz, B. and Slater, R. 1990. Revolution and Political Change in the Third World. Boulder. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Sederberg, P. 1994. Fires Within: Political Violence and Revolutionary Change. New York. HarperCollins College Publishers.
- Slim, H. 2004. Dithering over Darfur? A preliminary review of the international response. International Affairs No. 80, 5. Pp. 811-828.

Straus, S, 2005. Darfur and the Genocide Debate. Foreign Affairs. Jan/Feb 2005, Vol. 84, Issue 1. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.

Sudan. 2006. Human Rights Watch.  
[http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/sudan12310\\_txt.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/sudan12310_txt.htm)

Sudan: Events of 2006. 2007. Human Rights Watch.  
<http://hrw.org/englishwr2k7/docs/2007/01/11/sudan14715.htm>

Sudan: World Shamed Over Darfur Helicopters. July 31 2008. allAfrica.com.  
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200807310010.html>

SUDAN'S COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT: THE LONG ROAD AHEAD. 2006a. Africa Report 106. International Crisis Group.

Sudan's Islamist rebels. May 20, 2008. New Statesman.  
<http://www.newstatesman.com/africa/2008/05/darfur-sudan-movement>

Tanner, V. and Tubiana, J. 2007. Divided They Fall: The Fragmentation of Darfur's Rebel Groups. Small Arms Survey. Published by Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva. Retrieved from [www.smallarmssurvey.org](http://www.smallarmssurvey.org)

Walt, S. 2001. A Theory of Revolution and War. In Katz, M. (Ed.). Revolution: International Dimensions. Washington, DC. CQ Press. Pp. 32-62.

Weede, E. and Muller, E. 1998. Rebellion, Violence and Revolution: A Rational Choice Perspective. Journal of Peace Research. Vol. 35, No. 1. Pp. 43-59. Retrieved from JSTOR.

Welch, C. and Taintor, M. 1972. Revolution and Political Change. Belmont. Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. Pp. 1-19.

Who are Sudan's Darfur rebels? 10 May 2008. BBC Online.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7039360.stm>