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Book review: Darfur: the long road to disaster: by J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins

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Darfur: the long road to disaster. By J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins.

Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers. 2006. 340pp. Index. Pb.: £19.95. isbn 1 55876 4054.

At a time when Hollywood stars are leading the world in observing 'Darfur day' to show solidarity with civilians in the war-torn region, the US is imposing sanctions against companies involved in the oil business with the government of Sudan and the UN is drafting yet another resolution to exert international pressure on Khartoum, this book's title is somewhat misleading. In fact the book is not solely about Darfur. Those seeking a succinct overview of why the world has been gripped by the attacks and mass displacement in a remote region in western Sudan are better advised to look elsewhere.

There has been no shortage of information on Darfur since the most recent outbreak of conflict in February 2003. Innumerable journalistic accounts and human rights reports have drawn a detailed picture of the shocking scale of ongoing atrocities. Yet recent accounts tend to situate Darfur's conflict as the result of relatively recent marginalization by a power-hungry and centralized government in Khartoum. Darfur's exclusion from the North/South Sudanese peace process, that led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, is often cited as the underlying reason for the region's descent into war since 2003. In-depth scholarship on the long history of the conflict has been scarce. Recent noteworthy books have concentrated on either the linkage between developments in the region with international structures, or the background of the warring actors, such as the works by Gerard Prunier and Alex de Waal and Julie Flint.

Darfur: the long road to disaster is an altogether different book and one that fills important lacunae. It replaces the now out-of-print *Africa's thirty years war* (1999) and adds currency with a concise chapter on recent developments and an epilogue. It delves deeply into the history of the entire region to uncover the interlocking and complex root causes of the crisis. Furthermore, it asks difficult questions such as: why has the war escalated? By presenting a historical context of regional political relations between Chad, Libya and Sudan, this book posits that the war in Darfur is primarily about power, borders and

identity. Burr and Collins have admirably used a wide range of sources to write a convincing study of a multi-layered, complex conflict, driven by leadership, tribal differences, race and religion, geopolitical players and international actors. Darfur's recent disaster is captured only as the last chapter (which unfortunately suffers from slight inaccuracies) in this long-running conflict that has devastated the triangle in various locations at various times since 1963.

The book gives a clear and detailed account of the power struggle in the Chad, Libya and Sudan triangle, starting with the civil war in Chad in the early 1960s, in which the Muslim north rebelled against the ruling African Christian south. Muslim rebels found supporters in the Sudanese government in their quest to overthrow the Tombalbaye government in Chad. When Libya under Colonel Qadhafi entered the conflict, the conflict triangle was to further engage the US, France, the UN and the Organization of African Unity. The detailed analysis of French–Chadian relations, US–Libyan interactions and the international role makes clear that the disaster in Darfur has many roots that are important to consider.

While the book purports to be about Darfur, it is about much more: it is an outstanding analysis of the history of bloody conflict in a vast African region over 40 years. The historical lessons of profound interconnectedness that can be learned from it are timely and needed in the current Darfur debate.

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