

Globalised rebellion: the Darfur insurgents and the world*

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A B S T R A C T

This article is concerned with the rebellion in Darfur as a way to illustrate the politics of insurgency in the era of globalisation. We first show how the Darfur rebels have projected their struggle onto the world stage, before examining the effects that this has engendered. On the one hand, Darfur's global profile solidified the rebels' cause and co-opted international actors in support of it. This translated into real leverage for the rebels, and it constrained the Sudanese government by reducing its ability to use brute force. At the same time, internationalisation encouraged the Darfur rebels to make maximalist demands at the expense of articulating a broader political vision addressing the root causes of conflict. Moreover, the substitution of local legitimacy for international connections lowered the barriers of entry for new groups and thus promoted fragmentation. The combination of these effects makes for intractable conflict scenarios, the current situation in Darfur being a case in point.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2003, an amalgam of Darfur rebels attacked the airport of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. The attack was a resounding success, as it pulverised the Sudanese army's air force presence in Darfur. However, the world did not notice the attack. Neither did it pay attention when the government, with the aid of militia groups, launched a brutal counter-insurgency campaign aimed at destroying the support base of the rebels. Change only came around the ten-year anniversary of the Rwanda genocide in April 2004 when a senior UN official compared the situation in Darfur with Rwanda. This triggered extensive media coverage and, eventually, a vocal advocacy movement that succeeded in making Darfur a cause célèbre in Western public opinion. Within months, Darfur underwent a process of fast-track globalisation. Undoubtedly, this process has affected the dynamics of the Darfur conflict, not least because it led to far-reaching international involvement. Thus, international actors set up the world's largest humanitarian operation, deployed the biggest UN peacekeeping mission, and indicted the Sudanese president on the grounds of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Evidently, the globalisation of Darfur also had ramifications for the rebel movements. In this context, Mamdani (2009: 47) argued that the one-sided portrayal of the conflict in Darfur as genocide led Western countries to neglect the role of rebel groups in perpetuating the violence. Beyond Mamdani's rather provocative argument, this paper aims to make sense of the trajectory of the Darfur insurgency in the context of worldwide publicity. How have the insurgents contributed to making Darfur a global cause célèbre? How has the interaction with the world fed back and influenced the course of the rebellion? In tackling these questions, we utilise the empirical material from our respective doctoral research projects. In particular, we draw on over 100 interviews that we each conducted with various international and Sudanese experts, including representatives of rebel movements.

Our analysis is also inspired by the literature on 'the international politics of insurgency', which Clapham (1996: 207–43) identified as one factor undermining African states since the 1980s. Thus, the internationalisation of rebellion has been promoted by a few sympathetic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that generate publicity and deploy their contacts in support of the insurgents. Bob (2005) sees insurgent groups as agents in this process, actively promoting their

struggle on a 'market for transnational support' with the aim of obtaining international recognition and support. Only the savviest groups succeed in framing their struggle in such a way that it resonates with advocacy networks in the West, which then help to popularise their cause. On a related note, Schlichte (2009) described the need for rebel groups to generate legitimacy for their struggle as a way of overcoming the de-legitimising effect of violence. One way of doing this is for insurgents to appeal to international norms and sponsors, for example by framing their struggle in terms of the widely accepted right to self-determination. Another example is Kuperman's (2008) application of the moral hazard problem to provide a somewhat reductionist theory of civil wars: the growing acceptance of humanitarian intervention thus provides an incentive for rebel groups to escalate their struggle, hoping the brutality of the government's retaliation will trigger international intervention.

Their differences notwithstanding, these authors all diverge from the literature on the political economy of civil wars (e.g. Collier & Hoeffler 2002) in that they conceive of the notion of 'internationalisation' not merely as an economic strategy of accumulation beyond borders, but as a social process, through which insurgent groups articulate their struggle on the global level. It is this latter approach that we adopt. We thus focus less on the material dimension of internationalisation—for example the support that neighbouring countries, namely Chad, Eritrea and Libya, provided the Darfur rebels with. Rather, we focus on ideational elements of internationalisation, such as the existence of an advocacy movement and the framing of Darfur as genocide. Taking this into account, we put forward the following core argument: internationalisation has ambiguous effects on insurgent groups, enabling and disabling their struggle at the same time. Thus, on the one hand, it solidifies their cause and co-opts international actors in support of it. This translates into real leverage for the rebels, and it constrains the government by reducing its ability to use brute force. At the same time, internationalisation, by creating the perception that international backing is forthcoming, may foster maximalist demands at the expense of articulating a broader political vision addressing the root causes of conflict. Moreover, the substitution of local legitimacy for international connections lowers the barriers of entry for new groups and may thus promote fragmentation. In the absence of decisive international intervention, the combination of these effects makes for intractable conflict scenarios, oscillating between low-level conflict and occasional escalation, without the prospect

of sustainable resolution. Indeed, this accurately describes the current situation in Darfur ten years after the outbreak of the insurgency.

In developing this argument, the article is structured as follows: we first provide a short synopsis of the Darfur rebellion and describe the context in which Darfur became a global cause célèbre. Second, we consider the mechanisms through which the Darfur rebels have contributed to this process by projecting their struggle onto the world stage. In the third part, we discuss the implications of internationalisation in the context of Darfur and formulate the propositions that constitute our core argument. We conclude by briefly discussing the theoretical implications of our research and by suggesting avenues for further research.

THE DARFUR CONFLICT AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

Darfur was an independent sultanate until 1916 when it was irrevocably integrated into greater Sudan, at the time under Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule (Daly 2010). Within the Sudanese state it has for a long time been a marginalised region deprived of resources and lacking political autonomy. However, Darfuri political opposition used to be primarily focused on non-violent constitutional channels (El-Battahani 2009: 57–8). This changed after 1987–89 when Darfur became the stage of a regional proxy war spilling over from Chad (Prunier 2007). As Darfur was flooded with cheap weapons and supremacist Arab ideology, armed conflict between non-Arab sedentary tribes—chiefly the Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa—and Arab nomads broke out, entrenching antagonistic ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ identities among many Darfurians (De Waal 2005). This provided the background against which two distinct rebellions emerged in Darfur, one of which had its roots in the farming communities of non-Arab tribes. As tensions mounted in the mid-1990s, three students from the Fur tribe, Abdel Wahid al-Nur, Ahmad Abdel Shafi and Abdu Abdalla Ismail, came together in Khartoum and created a clandestine organisation, which later became the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M). They made an alliance with Zaghawa and later Massalit leaders in 2001 and staged their first joint attack on an army garrison in February 2002 (Flint & de Waal 2008: 83).

At a similar time, another rebel movement was formed by disaffected members of the Sudanese political elite, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). JEM was founded by Darfuri members of the National Islamic Front, who left the government when Hassan al-Turabi,

the initial leader of the Islamist movement in Sudan, was ousted from power in 1999–2000. JEM made its entrance on the political arena when it published the ‘Black Book’ in May 2000, which offered ‘a political and economic anatomy of Sudan that detailed the marginalisation of most of Sudan’s citizens’ (Flint & de Waal 2008: 102). Drawing on extensive data on various types of inequalities in Sudan, the Black Book constituted the first political manifesto of JEM.¹ Indeed, throughout the conflict JEM has had an advantage over the SLA thanks to its ability to articulate a coherent political agenda. However, some Darfurians have remained cautious with regards to JEM, not only because of its strong component of Islamists, but because many of its leaders are Zaghawa from the Kobe branch that inhabits the border area between Chad and Sudan (Tanner & Tubiana 2007: 31–4). Indeed, the cross-border connections of the Zaghawa have been one of the main factors of the intertwining of the Darfur conflict and the crisis in Chad. This led to what Marchal (2006) has termed a ‘system of conflicts’ across the Chad–Sudan border.

The rebellion in Darfur is often said to have started in earnest in February 2003, when the Darfur Liberation Front (later to become the SLA) claimed an attack on Gulu, a district headquarters in central Darfur. At that time, the government of Sudan was engaged in peace talks with the Southern insurgents, the SPLA/M. The Darfur rebels, holding their own deep-seeded grievances, took notice of the far-reaching concessions that the southern insurgents were obtaining from the government. Moreover, the SPLM, looking to increase its leverage over Khartoum, provided the Darfur rebels with training and arms, and they also helped them write a political manifesto reminiscent of the SPLM’s ‘New Sudan’ concept (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2004: 20; Flint & de Waal 2008: 87–94; Roessler 2010). The Darfur rebellion was definitively launched on 25 April 2003, when SLA and JEM jointly attacked the airport of El Fasher. The attack was a resounding success for the rebels, as they destroyed half a dozen military aircrafts and captured an air force general. As Flint & de Waal (2008: 121) note: ‘In more than twenty years’ war in the South, the SPLA had never inflicted such a loss on the air force. The rebels were jubilant.’

After the Fasher attack, the Sudanese government realised that the Darfur rebels were a force to be reckoned with. Having dismissed earlier attempts by the governor of North Darfur, General Ibrahim Suleiman, to negotiate with the rebels, the government handed the Darfur file over to the Sudanese military intelligence (Flint & de Waal 2008: 116–20). They sought to crush the rebels, but relying on their own armed forces

would have required heavy redeployment and training, which was not feasible. Instead, the Khartoum security establishment opted for 'counter-insurgency on the cheap' (De Waal 2004) by arming local Arab militia, the so-called 'Janjaweed', promising them impunity and supporting them with air attacks (Hagar 2007). This strategy was reminiscent of the North–South civil war, where the government had repeatedly used local militias in its fight against the SPLA (Johnson 2006; Rolandsen 2007). The scorched earth tactic deployed in Darfur was supposed to destroy the civilian support base of the rebels, but it first and foremost led to massive killings and displacements (De Waal 2004). In early 2004, thousands of people, mostly from non-Arab tribes, were killed and over a million displaced. The months between July 2003 and spring 2004 were thus the most violent period of the conflict.

It was only towards the end of this period that the world started to pay attention to Darfur. Rebel groups, humanitarian organisations and Darfurians in the diaspora, had in vain sounded the alarm bell during the early stages of the conflict, followed by calls for action from advocacy organisations like Amnesty International (2003) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2003). Even when in December 2003, Jan Egeland, then UN Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, characterised the humanitarian situation in Darfur as 'one of the worst in the world' (quoted in United Nations News Centre 2003) the world remained passive. The turning point came on the eve of the ten-year commemoration of the Rwandan genocide in March 2004. This was when Mukesh Kapila, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Khartoum told news channels that 'the only difference between Rwanda and Darfur now is the numbers involved' (quoted in IRIN News 2004).

The inference that genocide was occurring in Darfur was soon picked up by journalists and opinion leaders. Starting in late March 2004, Nicholas Kristof from the *New York Times* began to prolifically write opinion editorials about Darfur, often comparing the conflict with the Rwanda genocide.² Similarly, the anti-genocide scholar Samantha Power contributed an editorial with the title 'Remember Rwanda, but Take Action in Sudan' (*New York Times*, 6.4.2004), while Romeo Dallaire, the famous UN force commander of the ill-fated UN peacekeeping mission during the Rwanda genocide, wrote 'Looking at Darfur, Seeing Rwanda' (*Toronto Star*, 5.10.2004). The message could not have been clearer: Darfur was framed as the 'new' Rwanda (Murphy 2007; Brunk 2008). Against the background of the rising press coverage, a civil society advocacy campaign started to take shape in the USA during the summer of 2004. In July, the Save Darfur Coalition (SDC) was created

by an amalgam of human rights organisations and faith-based groups, many of them Jewish organisations (Hamilton 2011). In the UK, the Protect Darfur campaign, coordinated by the advocacy group Aegis Trust, was established in March 2005. In France, the 'Urgence Darfour' coalition was founded in February 2005.

The level of civil society mobilisation around Darfur went beyond expectations, and governments soon reacted with myriad of measures, albeit shying away from military intervention. Thus, governments provided funding for humanitarian aid operations; they referred the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC); and they deployed a peacekeeping mission with a Chapter VII mandate from the UN Security Council, which replaced the existing African Union (AU) monitors (Lanz 2011). The Darfur crisis also triggered a number of diplomatic initiatives. Starting in late 2003, efforts were undertaken to facilitate peace talks between the government and the different rebel movements. Under the mediation of Chadian President Déby, the parties signed a ceasefire agreement in April 2004, but the agreement was never implemented. The peace talks continued under the auspices of the AU, first in Addis Ababa and then in Abuja, Nigeria, where a peace agreement was eventually signed in May 2006. However, the agreement was widely considered as flawed, as it was only signed by one of three rebel leaders, Minni Minawi, who had splintered away from the SLA in 2005, and as a result of intense pressures from international sponsors (Nathan 2006). Neither Abdel Wahid nor Khalil Ibrahim signed the Abuja agreement, which was followed by increased fighting on the ground in Darfur (Fadul & Tanner 2007) and fragmentation within the rebel groups (Flint 2007; Assal 2009).

The UN and the AU, through the joint efforts of Salim Ahmed Salim and Jan Eliasson, subsequently tried to re-launch negotiations, but they were not successful. It was only in September 2008 that the peace process received new impetus when Qatar became the new sponsor of the negotiations between the Darfur rebels and the Sudanese government. The talks went on for many months, as the Darfur rebels filled the five-star hotels of Doha. Eventually, in July 2011, the government signed an agreement with a new faction, led by the former Umma Party official Tijani Sese, although JEM had opted out of the process earlier and Abdel Wahid never came to the table. Sese returned to Sudan in October, while the government selectively implemented some of the constitutional provisions of the Doha agreement. In any case, the peace process was marred by continued fighting on the ground and by a context of intense bargaining and politicking in Khartoum following

the secession of South Sudan in July 2011. Thus, JEM, Abdel Wahid and Minni Minawi, who had rescinded the DPA in the meantime, joined forces with the rebels of the SPLA-North in South Kordofan and Blue Nile and formed the Sudan Revolutionary Front in November 2011. The rebel alliance suffered a setback when JEM's Chairman, Khalil Ibrahim was killed in an aerial attack the following month.

HOW THE DARFUR REBELS PROJECTED THEIR CAUSE ON THE WORLD STAGE

Darfur did not, of course, become a cause célèbre on its own. Rather, it was the outcome of deliberate action by people and organisations that sought to raise the international profile of Darfur. Scholars have examined the role of transnational advocacy groups (Mamdani 2009; Gabrielsen 2009, Lanz 2009, 2011; Gabrielsen Jumbert 2010; Hamilton 2011) and the media (Murphy 2007; Ray 2009; Mody 2010) in this process. The role of the rebel movements has not, however, been systematically analysed, although their efforts were clearly a significant factor in the process of internationalisation that Darfur has undergone since March 2004. How did they go about it? We have identified four interrelated mechanisms through which the rebels have projected their struggle onto the world stage, which we will present in turn: inviting foreign journalists; activating diaspora networks; connecting with Darfur activists; and adapting their discourse. Notable is that in all their efforts to reach out to the world, the Darfur rebels have relied on modern communications technology, most importantly the internet, satellite and mobile phones.

Inviting foreign journalists

The global media plays a key role in raising international awareness about conflicts in remote areas. Not surprisingly, the Darfur rebels have from early on engaged with foreign journalists and encouraged them to visit the areas under their control, the so-called 'liberated areas'. According to one foreign correspondent covering Sudan (2011 int.), 'The Darfur rebels recognised that they could use the international media as a weapon in their war. I found it relatively easy to contact the SLA to travel with them in Jebel Mara, likewise with JEM in North Darfur.' These visits were often facilitated by diaspora members of the rebel groups in Western countries. On the ground, the journalists were picked up by middlemen, who brought the journalists to rebel-held

areas from across the border in Chad or from one of Darfur's main towns. In the liberated areas, the journalists would live and travel with rebel contingents. The British filmmaker Philip Cox, who was one of the first foreign journalists to visit Darfur in early 2004, is a case in point. His visit was organised by a London-based activist and sympathiser of the SLM, who later also brought journalists from Al-Jazeera to Darfur (SLM member 2011 int.). The visit was very effective. Cox provided the first TV images of the Darfur conflict, which were broadcast around the world, and he also facilitated visits of other news teams. He later recalled: 'Before I left Darfur I called up BBC and they were very excited. And eventually I sold the material to Channel 4 and to CNN, ARD, Scandinavian and Japanese TV. Everyone came in. This was in April, May 2004. And then a lot of people wanted my contacts to get in. For a while there were various news teams. I had no problem putting them in touch with my rebel contacts.' (Philip Cox 2011 int.) Cox later produced an award-winning documentary about his time with the SLA, which was widely broadcast.

As Darfur hit the headlines in the summer of 2004, the rebels proceeded to organise visits of international NGOs, who would bring with them embedded journalists. This was the case of the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), which has a long experience working in SPLA-controlled areas in South Sudan. According to an NPA representative (2007 int.),

In July 2004, we made a trip to the SLA areas in the Jebel Marra area. This was the first media visit to the region. The Norwegian daily *Dagbladet* was on board, along with two European TV-companies, Reuters and one other. The SLA with Ahmed Abdul Shafi organised our trip. He was the foreign affairs officer of Abdel Wahid al-Nur at that time. This was the first visit to the rebel-held South Darfur.

Around the same time, John Prendergast and Samantha Power went to the liberated areas of Darfur. Their accounts received a lot of publicity and essentially relayed the narrative of the rebels. In an opinion editorial in the *New York Times* (15.7.2004), Prendergast recounted: 'Bodies of young men were lined up in ditches, eerily preserved by the 130-degree desert heat. The story the rebels told us seemed plausible: the dead were civilians who had been marched up a hill and executed by the Arab-led government before its troops abandoned the area the previous month. The rebels assert that there were many other such scenes.' An article by Power in the *New Yorker* (30.8.2004) included similarly gory scenes. Both Prendergast and Power became influential figures in the Darfur advocacy movement.

The closest to a perfect propaganda stunt for the rebels was a later visit by French writer and celebrity-activist Bernard-Henri Lévy. His journey to Darfur in March 2007 was sponsored by the Save Darfur Coalition and organised by Abdel Wahid al-Nur in Paris, where the SLA leader lived in exile from 2006 until 2011. On the ground, BHL, as he is known in France, was assisted by Abdel Wahid's men from the SLA, who brought him into Darfur from Chad (Tubiana 2007). His account of the situation in Darfur was published in *Le Monde* (13.3.2007) and essentially made him a spokesperson of the rebels. Thus, BHL recommended that the international community arm the rebels in order to help them win the war in Darfur. His call had little echo in the international community, but he became one of the driving forces in the French advocacy movement and contributed to enhancing the French media coverage of the Darfur conflict (Weissman 2010). To sum up, despite some unsuccessful attempts to trigger international media attention in 2003, the insurgents facilitated several trips of international journalists and opinion leaders from 2004 onwards. This greatly helped to make Darfur known and relayed the rebels' narrative to the world. It also committed their visitors, many of them well-known writers with extensive connections and media pull, to the Darfur cause.

Activating diaspora networks

When the insurgency started, the Darfur diaspora played a major role. According to the Sudanese scholar Suliman Baldo (2011 int.), 'The shock of the first reports about Darfur provoked a major reaction within the Darfur diaspora. In North America, Europe, the Middle East, they got organised to make known what was happening in Darfur and to help their communities back home. They mobilised a lot of support.' The Darfur rebels managed to capture some of this support, which contributed to internationalising their cause. For example, members of the diaspora helped the insurgents on the ground acquire satellite phones. These phones were useful on the battlefield and they allowed the rebels to call journalists and human rights organisations, something they were unable to do at the outset of the conflict in 2002 (Flint & de Waal 2008: 292). Thus, members of the Darfur diaspora transferred funds to affiliates in Dubai – a place that did not fall under the Sudanese sanctions regime. The middlemen subsequently sent the 14-digit scratch card codes via SMS to the field, allowing the rebels to recharge their Thuraya satellite phones (SLM member 2011 int.). Beyond material

support, the diaspora was instrumental for the rebels in establishing political connections in Western capitals. According to I.D.F. & Assal (2010: 39–40), ‘These social networks and an understanding of how politics worked in these countries helped the rebels develop effective connections beyond Sudan’s borders.’ Germany is a case in point. According to Haydar Ibrahim (2007 int.) of the Khartoum-based Sudanese Studies Centre,

Germany seems like the centre for the Darfurian people abroad. Most Darfuris in Germany are affiliated with different armed movements in Darfur, the SLM, the JEM, and all the others. All the factions and the different movements have representatives in Germany, in Berlin, in Frankfurt and even in the small towns. The main source of the news and the mass media are these Darfuris and even the Sudanese government is accusing Germany of supporting the Darfuris.

All rebel movements relied on diaspora members. For example, JEM relied on Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, an anthropology professor in Ireland. He described his role as follows (2011 int.): ‘I want to connect JEM with the West. For this, I give lectures and I go to meetings. I do interviews. I talk in the radio. I represent JEM in the English-speaking world. I also attend negotiations. I was in Abuja and Doha.’ As interlocutors with Western governments, people like El-Tom are useful to raise awareness about Darfur and to alleviate fears raised by JEM’s Islamist background. The diaspora connections were equally important for the SLM. Abel Wahid had spokespersons in different capitals. Particularly important was Ahmed Mohamedain Abdalla, a Darfuri based in Canada, who provided advice, drafted speeches, and liaised with foreign governments on Abdel Wahid’s behalf. Two other figures stand out in the SLM’s diaspora network: the doyen of Darfuri political opposition and Chairman of the Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA), Ahmed Diraiqe, and Sharif Harir, former lecturer of anthropology in Norway and co-founder of the SFDA. Diraiqe was somewhat sceptical about the ‘young Turks’ in the Darfur rebel movement and, apart from a brief engagement as head of the National Redemption Front, stayed outside the rebellion (Diraiqe 2011 int.). However, he was a relentless advocate of the Darfur cause and acted as a mentor for many SLA rebels. Harir was formally integrated in the SLM and participated in peace negotiations as one of its representatives. In a nutshell, the diaspora acted as translators between the locally rooted rebels and the global reality of international politics. Activating the diaspora network thus served to increase the knowledge about the situation in Darfur in the international realm.

Connecting with the Darfur activists

As mentioned above, a civil society advocacy campaign emerged in the USA, the UK and France starting in 2004. This campaign was instrumental in raising the profile of Darfur in global public opinion and it undoubtedly helped the rebels internationalise their cause. The campaign provided the rebels with a ready-made platform, which functioned as an intermediary between the rebels and international audiences. The campaigns boosted the rebels' profile and gave them instant credibility on what Bob (2005) called the 'market for transnational support'. For example, when Suleiman Jamous, at the time SLM's humanitarian coordinator, was held by the government, Mia Farrow's son Ronan wrote an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (21.6.2007) calling for Jamous's release and comparing him with Nelson Mandela. In turn, the rebel representatives provided the activists with information from the field, shaping a narrative that was conducive to internationalising Darfur. Thus, Abdel Wahid's advisor Abdul Mohamedain worked with Eric Reeves, one of the most prolific Sudan campaigners in the USA, as an editor of his 2005 book on Darfur, *A Long Day's Dying*. Crucial to establish the linkages between rebel movements and activists were members of the Sudanese diaspora working for advocacy groups in North America and Europe, such as Omer Ismail of the Enough Project, Niemat Ahmadi of SDC and Abdelbagi Jibril of the Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre. While they did not formally belong to the movements, and even occasionally criticised them, they shared the rebels' anti-government stance and helped to secure communication with the activist milieu.

However, despite these linkages, the USA-based advocacy movement, and SDC in particular, was keen to differentiate itself from the rebels, especially on the question of non-consensual military intervention, which it did not advocate for. This led to some frustrations among the rebels. According to an SDC representative (2011 int.), 'We didn't coordinate with rebel groups, to the contrary. When we met them they were lecturing us why we weren't calling for bombing Sudan.' It appears that some of the activists, on request of the UN-AU mediators, even tried to get Abdel Wahid to join the peace talks, albeit to no avail (SDC representative 2010 int.). The US activists' reluctance to be associated with the rebels was reflected during a rally in Paris organised by Urgence Darfour on 20 March 2007, a few weeks before the French presidential elections. Reportedly, an envoy from SDC had come to Paris especially for this meeting. He expressed his concern with the list of attendants

and speakers, stressing that he did not wish to shake hands with Abdel Wahid, who was also present. The French activists visibly had less trouble with that. The rally was not intended as a support meeting for the Darfur rebels, but it nonetheless resembled that, as Abdel Wahid raised his fist as a symbol of victory every time someone mentioned the rebellion in Darfur. BHL was present at the meeting, along with the leadership of the French Darfur advocacy movement, and most candidates of the upcoming presidential elections. One of the speakers was Bernard Kouchner, a long-term advocate of humanitarian intervention, who was a few months later nominated as France's foreign minister by then President Nicolas Sarkozy. Kouchner's appointment was seen by many as an attempt by the new government to co-opt the Darfur activist movement (Glaser & Smith 2008: 62–4). Although there was no official support from the Ministry, it maintained close contacts with Abdel Wahid, and Kouchner continued to champion the cause of Darfur during his tenure as foreign minister. Abdel Wahid also took advantage of his association with BHL, who invited him to public events and opened a blog for him on his online platform 'La règle du jeu'.³ Thus, regardless of whether the activist movements kept their distance or engaged more directly with the Darfur rebels, the massive campaign around Darfur allowed them to project their cause in the world and created the impression that they had far-reaching international support.

Adapting the discourse

Another mechanism of projection for the Darfur rebels consisted in the alignment of their discourses with well-known categories in the west, such as genocide, federalism and humanitarian intervention. This was useful because it generated legitimacy for the rebellion and provided a framework for public opinion in Western countries to make sense of the events in far-away Darfur. Clapham (1998: 17) aptly captured this dynamic when he stressed the importance of language in the internationalisation of rebellion: 'Politicians everywhere use different vocabularies to address different audiences, but the range required of insurgent leaders is particularly great, stretching from the mobilisation of indigenous spirituality, on the one hand, to the matching mobilisation of Western ideologies of development, democracy or human rights on the other.'

Abdel Wahid is particularly adept in calibrating his speeches. In an interview with one of the authors, not only did he consistently refer to the conflict in Darfur as genocide, but he also spoke of 'concentration

camps' when talking about the internally displaced camps in Darfur and of the 'final solution' when referring to Khartoum's actions (Al-Nur 2007 int.). The reference to the Holocaust both served to render the urgency to 'do something' about Darfur and to denigrate the Sudanese governments and those advocating for engagement with it. Another example in this respect is al-Nur's opinion editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (18.6.2008) entitled 'Why We Won't Talk to Sudan's Islamofascists'. In it, Abdel Wahid painted the Darfur rebellion as a bulwark against Islamist extremism: 'We founded the SLM in 1992 in response to the violence perpetrated by the Arab-Islamist dictatorship of G. Omar al-Bashir. His National Islamic Front had seized power three years earlier in a military coup and immediately engaged in a brutal jihad against the African population in South Sudan, in the Blue Nile and Nuba Mountain region.' Deploying the term 'jihad' here directly addressed the US public opinion, particularly wary of the consequences of Islamic extremism since 11 September 2001. At the same time, Abdel Wahid portrayed himself as a progressive leader: 'we must forge new alliances, no longer based upon race or religion, but upon shared values of freedom and democracy. This is why we opened a representative office in Israel last February.' Notably, the mention of the terms 'freedom' and 'democracy' echoed US regime change discourses, while the association with Israel sought to place the SLM in proximity of a traditional US ally. Abdel Wahid also fine-tuned his discourse for French public opinion, emphasising his role as the leader of the Darfuri resistance, as mentioned below.

JEM's discourse is more sophisticated in terms of generating international support for their cause. Khalil Ibrahim continuously emphasised the marginalisation of Darfur in the wider context of the imbalance between an all-powerful centre and neglected peripheries – a recurrent theme since the publication of the Black Book in 2000. This discourse resonated particularly in Sudan among those who have long been excluded from political power. While keeping with the essence of the centre-periphery argument, JEM slightly adapted its discourse when addressing international audiences. Indicative of this is the fact that the English translation of the Black Book differs in some respects from the Arabic original (Bolton 2010). Thus, the English version appeals to a more international audience, while the original was oriented to a Sudanese and Islamist audience.⁴ Beyond the Black Book, JEM has articulated a federalist solution based on power sharing between different regions in Sudan, similar to the organisation of the state in the USA or Germany. El-Tom (2011 int.) articulated this vision

as follows: 'Our aim is to restructure Sudan and create a system whereby all Sudanese would have equal opportunities, responsibilities and status irrespective of their religion, creed, region, language and so forth. We want a democratic system whereby people would elect all their leaders from the council to the president. And we want a confederal system whereby each region has autonomous powers.' This is echoed by an interview that Khalil Ibrahim gave in 2009: 'The entire "periphery" of the country wants liberation from the "centre". The only way out is for Sudan to become a federation, which would consist of (six) autonomous regions. This can be accomplished by preserving the religious diversity and working on the basis of consensus politics' (quoted in Loeb *et al.* 2010: 46). Thus, the discourse on federalism resonates with Western political elites familiar with this kind of state structure, while the marginalisation of the periphery by the centre is a common theme for the political left, which has used this model to make sense of the domination of capitalist societies in the centre over developing countries in the periphery.

HOW INTERNATIONALISATION AFFECTED THE DARFUR INSURGENCY

Provided the context of the Darfur conflict, it is easy to understand why the Darfur rebels sought to internationalise their struggle. The rebels were the weaker party in military terms, and while they could inflict serious damage on the government through hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, winning the war on the battlefield was not feasible. Most importantly, the people the rebels sought to defend were suffering vicious attacks, which led to mass killings and displacements. However, at the outset of the conflict in 2002–03 Darfur was not known in the international community, which meant that the government did not face international condemnation for its actions. Shining the spotlight on Darfur was an attempt by the rebels to change this dynamic. It was a way of taking the fight to a different level. After 11 September 2001, the Sudanese regime of Omar al-Bashir was eager to break out of the international isolation into which it had manoeuvred itself (Johnson 2011). Thanks to the signature of the Machakos Protocol in July 2002 and its willingness to work towards a comprehensive agreement with the SPLM, Khartoum was starting to regain some legitimacy among Western countries with the prospect of full normalisation later on. The internationalisation of the Darfur conflict undermined this process, which was a way for the rebels to hit their adversary where it

hurt the most. These considerations notwithstanding, it is important to realise that strategy is not everything. Drawing international attention to the situation in Darfur also served as an outlet for the rebels' frustration and helplessness over the suffering that Darfuris were enduring during the conflict – a reaction that is both natural and legitimate.

How has internationalisation affected the Darfur insurgency? In what follows, we formulate three propositions, which seem plausible based on our own observations as well as other people's accounts of the Darfur insurgency. Thus, we argue that internationalisation has encouraged maximalist demands and fostered a lack of willingness to compromise in peace talks. It has also fostered internal fragmentation and a lack of engagement on the local level. On a more positive note, we find it plausible that internationalisation has contributed to deterring extreme violence in Darfur, although there is no conclusive evidence to substantiate this claim. Armed conflicts are complex social processes affected by a multitude of factors, not least the military capabilities of conflict parties. In our view, internationalisation is one factor having influenced the Darfur rebellion on certain levels. However, our propositions do not represent hard-and-fast causal claims, but seek to open the debate about the repercussions of the changing politics of insurgency in a globalised world.

Grandstanding rhetoric and intransigence

The internationalisation of Darfur has encouraged grandstanding rhetoric and fostered a lack of willingness to compromise among rebel groups. For example, Abdel Wahid al-Nur labelled the Sudanese government 'Islamofascist' and 'génocidaire' and called for regime change on a conservative pro-Israeli online broadcasting platform.⁵ Khalil Ibrahim disparaged Omar al-Bashir as a criminal and demanded that he be arrested and tried at the ICC (quoted in Loeb *et al.* 2010). That conflict parties denounce each other with harsh rhetoric is not unusual per se, and it is certainly understandable in Darfur, given the scale of the crimes committed by Khartoum. However, in other conflicts, parties are eventually obliged to moderate their stance and seek a compromise with their enemy; otherwise they risk being eclipsed. The internationalisation of the Darfur conflict, and its framing as genocide, has engendered a different dynamic. The Darfur rebels were much more likely to get the attention of the media, activist groups and policymakers, which are crucial in an asymmetric context like Darfur, if they perpetuated the dominant narrative of the conflict.

The international environment thus provided an incentive for grand-standing rhetoric, rewarding those who bought into it and penalising those who did not. For some rebel leaders, in particular Abdel Wahid, intransigence has thus become a rational strategy. Instead of political engagement, these leaders prefer to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, hoping that international help will be forthcoming in the future.

A statement about the ICC indictment of al-Bashir by a young student affiliated with one of the rebel groups (2009 int.) is telling: 'It is good that the international community has accused the president, now they have to come and arrest him.' Another example is Abdel Wahid's stance towards peace talks. In Abuja, he demanded 'a guarantee for implementation like in Bosnia' (quoted in De Waal 2006). According to Alex de Waal (2006), who served as an advisor to the AU mediation team in Abuja, the fact that the desired NATO intervention was not forthcoming was one of the reasons why Abdel Wahid refused to sign the Darfur Peace Agreement. This position related to the debate about Darfur on the international level: activists were demanding the deployment of a robust peacekeeping mission, which they thought was more important than peace talks. At a big Darfur rally in Washington, which took place in April 2006 during the final stages of the Abuja talks, some activists booed a US government representative speaking about peace negotiations. After the DPA, the International Crisis Group (2006), which at the time had a close relationship with the Darfur activists, criticised the Abuja agreement for not making security guarantees in the form of a robust peacekeeping force a priority.⁶

After Abuja, al-Nur maintained his stance, refusing to participate in peace talks altogether. This even led his friend Bernard Kouchner to call him 'stubborn' (*Libération*, 24.3.2010). In response, al-Nur (2010) justified his position, invoking General De Gaulle for this purpose:

[M]y French friends ... explained to me how the Maréchal Pétain, in order to avoid military defeat, chose to collaborate with Hitler and deliver the Jews into the hands of the Nazis occupants. They told me how De Gaulle left the country, almost alone, and launched his famous June 18 appeal to the French to refuse defeat and German domination. Of the two, which one won? Who saved France? ... This is why I do not understand why your government is asking me to become the Pétain of Darfur.

Before negotiating with the Sudanese government, al-Nur demands that security be guaranteed by an international force that is different from the current peacekeeping mission: 'These troops are there to maintain the peace. Shouldn't there then be first a peace to maintain.'

The Sudanese government is still at war against us. We don't need maintainers of peace, we need makers of peace.' These claims only make sense against the background of the internationalisation of the Darfur conflict. Instead of taking responsibility and negotiating a peace settlement that requires painful compromises, Abdel Wahid preferred to opt out, hoping that the international context will change in his favour.

Another consequence of grandstanding rhetoric seems to be that it crowded out more constructive discussions about how the conflict in Darfur can be resolved and how governance could be organised to prevent future conflicts. For example, it is not surprising that the two most constructive proposals for a long-term solution of the Darfur conflict – the Heidelberg Darfur Dialogue Outcome Document and the Doha Declaration⁷ – were elaborated by representatives of civil society and not by rebel groups. One of the reasons for this may be that these proposals run counter to the dominant narrative of Darfur in the international community, whose support the rebels seek. For example, comparing Darfur with the Holocaust implies that violence in the conflict is not the result of a complicated social process, but simply of the projection of evil. The remedy, therefore, is not to negotiate a political settlement involving all parties to the conflict, but to stage an intervention stopping the ongoing genocide and punishing those responsible.

Fragmentation and lack of local engagement

Darfur's status as a global cause célèbre made it an object of prestige in international diplomacy. As a result, all kinds of international actors – the UN, the AU, the Arab League, the US, European states, Sudan's neighbouring countries, a host of international NGOs – professed their willingness to contribute to the resolution of the Darfur conflict. The competition among Arab states was particularly intense. When Qatar became the official venue for the negotiations, both Egypt and Libya launched parallel processes (Flint 2010: 37–9). Such activism led to a proliferation of often uncoordinated talks, consultations, and workshops, allowing the rebels to 'shop around' for the most promising forum. Peacemaking thus became a lucrative livelihood strategy, as the rebels travelled around the world, lived off generous per diems, and stayed in luxurious hotels. Tellingly, this earned them the nickname 'hotel rebels'.

The courting of the Darfur insurgents by international actors had two problematic consequences. One is that it lowered the barriers of entry

for new rebel groups and thus encouraged endless fragmentation and factionalisation. The establishment of a new group, and therefore the prospect of receiving international recognition and material benefits, was no longer linked to a leader's grassroots support or fighting power. Instead it depended on his international connections. Not surprisingly therefore, since the Abuja agreement in 2006, the Darfur insurgents have excessively fragmented (Tanner & Tubiana 2007).⁸ This created serious obstacles to peace, as it proved impossible to have serious negotiations with a multitude of actors whose alliances are constantly shifting. Also, the fragmentation made it easy for the Sudanese government to neutralise the rebel movements by applying the same divide-and-rule tactics that it had used during the war against the SPLM. An international journalist (2011 int.), who has travelled to Darfur with the rebels multiple times, describes these effects as follows:

Negotiating somewhere in a foreign country with nice hotels, prostitutes, and alcohol made it that the rebels did not feel like returning to Darfur. This creates a caste within the rebel movement, which jet-sets from one conference to another, losing their sense of reality in the process. The less intelligent fighters remain in the field, the more intelligent ones are sent abroad. There, they go into business for themselves and start fighting with each other. Khartoum has consciously fostered this, and the international community has contributed to such factionalisation.

A second and related consequence is that the international engagement drew the Darfur insurgents away from foot soldiers and the civilian population at the local level. Thus, Abdel Wahid has been absent from the field in Darfur since 2006, while Khalil Ibrahim spent extended periods in Chad and Libya. This contributed to a rift between the movement leaders and their field commanders, with the result that some of them switched over to different factions (Flint 2010). Moreover, it meant that the rebel leaders were less capable to organise the resistance at the grassroots. Indeed, contrary to the SPLM in South Sudan, the Darfur rebels did not establish a 'guerrilla government' in the form of a civilian administration consolidating the areas under their control (Rolandsen 2005). This reflects the rebels' military strength, but other factors may play a role as well. Traditionally, rebel movements, and first and foremost the SPLM, achieved internationalisation through 'practical humanitarianism'.⁹ This means that they established control over certain territories and then invited international NGOs, journalists and diplomats to these areas. The Darfur rebels did not have to do this, as Darfur was already widely known. Insofar as they have a strategic interest in internationalisation, it made it less crucial to establish

territorial control and may thus have contributed to lessening the rebels' engagement at the local level. Another consideration is that no rebel leader has acquired the legitimacy of uniting all Darfurians, as John Garang managed to do in South Sudan. There are also signs that the established groups are increasingly being challenged, in particular among young people in displaced camps (*Reuters News*, 29.7.2010), even if the rebel leaders still enjoy popular support, especially within their respective tribal groups (Loeb *et al.* 2010: 33–4).

Deterrence of mass violence

The previous two propositions pertain to problematic and mostly unintended consequences of the internationalisation of the Darfur conflict. The following point is qualitatively different in that it outlines a positive outcome related to the reduction of mass violence. Thus, when armed conflict escalated in Darfur in 2003, it went largely unnoticed. The situation today is fundamentally different, as thousands of international humanitarian workers and peacekeepers are present on the ground as a result of the internationalisation that the Darfur conflict has undergone since 2004. While it is impossible to ascertain how exactly this affected the belligerents' behaviour on the battlefield, it seems plausible that the international attention has contributed to deterring extreme violence in Darfur. Abuses against civilians remain commonplace, but the government has not reverted to the mass violence it instigated in 2003–04. Some observers have argued that this is because the government has achieved its objective of crushing the insurgents. However, armed groups continue to roam Darfur, and displaced camps have become a hotbed for subversive activities against the government. Therefore, one reason for the difference may be that with the international spotlight shining on Darfur, using mass atrocities as a counter-insurgency measure has become more costly. Also, the Sri Lankan scenario, where the government moves to completely eradicate the rebels, is difficult to conceive, given the international outcry that such action would provoke.

A similar deterrence effect may affect the insurgents. The UN Commission of Inquiry (United Nations 2005) as well as human rights organisations (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2004: 32–9) confirmed that rebel groups committed human rights violations and war crimes. However, contra the propaganda of Khartoum lobbyist David Hoile (2005), these abuses are in no way commensurate to those of government-affiliated groups. There is also no indication that the

Darfur rebels have systematically used mass violence against civilians as part of their war-making effort.¹⁰ Indeed, the SPLA seems to have used much more brutal methods in its war against Khartoum (e.g. Human Rights Watch 1994: chapter IV). Although substantiation is impossible, it is plausible to argue that the internationalisation of the Darfur conflict has played a role in discouraging them from using mass violence. Compared with the SPLA, the Darfur rebels have been much more exposed to the international media spotlight. While this is generally an asset for them, it also provided grounds for criticism, which puts their international reputation in jeopardy (Gabrielsen Jumbert 2010: 192). For example, criticism was forthcoming when rebel fighters killed ten AU peacekeepers in Haskanita, South Darfur (e.g. *New York Times* 1.10.2007). Not surprisingly, the fighters responsible for the attack later voluntarily surrendered to the ICC (*BBC News* 16.6.2010). Another example is the establishment of courts martial by JEM's leadership to judge fighters accused of having misbehaved on the battlefield (JEM member 2011 int.). Moreover, after being accused of using child soldiers, JEM signed an agreement with UNICEF in July 2010 barring the recruitment of fighters under the age of 18. Likewise, in April 2012, JEM signed a deed of commitment banning the use of anti-personnel mines with the NGO Geneva Call. The point here is not that these measures were perfectly implemented, or that the rebels did not commit some abuses. However, they are indicative of the importance the rebels attribute to good international standing. In this context, atrocities against civilians are less likely because they carry significant reputational costs.

CONCLUSION

Ignored by the world at its outset, the Darfur conflict has become a cause célèbre in the context of the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide in April 2004. This article has examined the role of the Darfur rebels in this process, and it has asked how internationalisation, once triggered, has affected the Darfur rebellion. Our research revealed ambiguous effects. On the one hand, when the eyes and ears of the world are turned to a conflict, the rebels possess real leverage vis-à-vis the government, and they seem to be less likely to use mass violence, for fear of jeopardising their international reputation. On the other hand, internationalisation encourages rebels to revert back to grandstanding rhetoric and intransigence, banking on the help of the international community later on in the conflict. International engagement also draws

rebels away from the local level and thus fosters internal fragmentation. The combination of these two effects partly explains the intractability that characterises the situation in Darfur today.

In the hypersensitive debate about Darfur it is important to clarify our argument. Thus, our research does not support Kuperman's (2009: 281) claim that 'the expectation of benefiting from intervention is what emboldened Darfur's rebels to fight'. To the contrary, rather than escalating the fighting, our findings suggest that the international concern for Darfur encouraged the rebels to take their struggle away from the battlefield into the international arena. Our argument should also not be misunderstood as questioning the legitimacy of rebellion in Darfur or blaming individual rebel leaders for the conflict – the main responsibility for both the outbreak of the conflict and the untenable status quo undoubtedly lies with the Sudanese government. In any case, this article did not tackle the question of individual responsibility, but rather described the broader socio-political context that makes sense of the behaviour of rebel groups.

Our study of the Darfur rebels has a number of theoretical implications, which open up avenues for further research. The case of Darfur seems to illustrate the evolution of Clapham's (1996) 'international politics of insurgency' in the era of globalisation. It is striking how recent rebellions – the uprisings in Libya, Syria, Bahrain or the Nuba Mountains being cases in point – have employed similar extraversion strategies. Even more so than the Darfuris, today's rebels are cognisant from the very outset of the strategic value of projecting their cause onto the world stage, and these efforts occupy a central space in their struggle. The use of social media and the internet has thus become an integral part of rebellion. This seems to point to an important change in the way civil wars are fought. Thus, to get a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics, it would be useful to study other cases of globalised rebellions. Also worthwhile is the study of globalised rebellions in a comparative perspective. This would allow insights into why some rebel groups have been successful in attracting international intervention, while others have failed in this endeavour.

NOTES

1. A recently edited book on Darfur (see Hassan & Ray 2009) includes an English translation and a review of the Black Book by Abdullahi Osman El-Tom (2009), a leading member of JEM.
2. The first of over 100 opinion editorials on Darfur by Nicholas Kristof was published in the *New York Times* on 24.3.2004 and entitled 'Ethnic Cleansing Again'.
3. The blog 'Darfour: Le chef de la résistance parle' contains eight articles by Abdel Wahid al-Nur and is available from <<http://laregledujeu.org/al-nour/>> (accessed 28.2.2012).

4. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this point.
5. The interview with Abdel Wahid al-Nur on the online platform democast.com is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOUYmZDC2mM&feature=youtube_gdata> (accessed 28.2.2012).
6. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this point.
7. The Heidelberg Darfur Dialogue outcome document is available at <http://www.mpil.de/shared/data/pdf/hdd_outcome_document_rev.pdf> (accessed on 28.2.2012). An unofficial translation of the Doha Declaration is available at <<http://www.darfurinfo.org/doha-english-rough.pdf>> (accessed 28.2.2012).
8. The Geneva-based Small Arms Survey provides the most reliable and up-to-date overview of the different rebel groups in Darfur, available at <<http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/facts-figures-armed-groups-darfur.php>> (accessed 27.2.2012).
9. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this term as it relates to the Darfur rebellion.
10. Indeed, none of the policy-oriented reports, which were based on extensive field research, indicate the systematic use of mass violence by rebel groups (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2004; International Crisis Group 2004; Tanner & Tubiana 2007).

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