



# Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror

*Mahmood Mamdani*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror

*Mahmood Mamdani*

## **Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror** Mahmood Mamdani

From the author of *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim* comes an important book, unlike any other, that looks at the crisis in Darfur within the context of the history of Sudan and examines the world's response to that crisis.

In *Saviors and Survivors*, Mahmood Mamdani explains how the conflict in Darfur began as a civil war (1987—89) between nomadic and peasant tribes over fertile land in the south, triggered by a severe drought that had expanded the Sahara Desert by more than sixty miles in forty years; how British colonial officials had artificially tribalized Darfur, dividing its population into “native” and “settler” tribes and creating homelands for the former at the expense of the latter; how the war intensified in the 1990s when the Sudanese government tried unsuccessfully to address the problem by creating homelands for tribes without any. The involvement of opposition parties gave rise in 2003 to two rebel movements, leading to a brutal insurgency and a horrific counterinsurgency—but not to genocide, as the West has declared.

Mamdani also explains how the Cold War exacerbated the twenty-year civil war in neighboring Chad, creating a confrontation between Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi (with Soviet support) and the Reagan administration (allied with France and Israel) that spilled over into Darfur and militarized the fighting. By 2003, the war involved national, regional, and global forces, including the powerful Western lobby, who now saw it as part of the War on Terror and called for a military invasion dressed up as “humanitarian intervention.”

Incisive and authoritative, *Saviors and Survivors* will radically alter our understanding of the crisis in Darfur.

## **Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror Details**

Date : Published March 17th 2009 by Pantheon

ISBN : 9780307377234

Author : Mahmood Mamdani

Format : Hardcover 416 pages

Genre : Cultural, Africa, Nonfiction, Politics, Northern Africa, Sudan, History, War, Anthropology

 [Download Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror  
Mahmood Mamdani**

---

## From Reader Review Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror for online ebook

### Tim says

Imperialistic overreach or humanitarian mission? That is the main question that Mamdani addresses in this extraordinary book about the situation in Darfur. I'll admit that I was one of those who thought that without question we should go in there and do what we can to solve what I believed to be a huge crisis. However, the well-sourced evidence in this book shows that the actual numbers are far off from what we've been told, and that the situation needs an internal resolution vs. outside intervention. There are geopolitical reasons as to why the U.S. would want to get involved in Darfur militarily, and that fact is obscured by the cause being driven by the leftist/liberal element here in the U.S. It is trendy to want to do something about Darfur, and the rhetoric is coming from the left. Mamdani was born and raised in Uganda, Sudan's neighbor, and has an incredible grasp on the history of the region, as well as a grasp as to how conflicts in Africa should be handled from the perspective of someone who has been there. Those of us in the west are so quick to name conflicts "genocide" with no real evidence or ignorant reasons to back it up. With the incredible evidence presented in this book, and the indictment of the ICC as a proxy of the U.S., Mamdani argues that what is needed in these kinds of conflicts is to allow sovereign countries to work out their own differences. The bottom line is that we would make the situation infinitely worse by sending a "peace-keeping" force into the middle of a conflict that we don't have a complete grasp on politically or culturally. We seem to have a passion for that in our foreign affairs, and we need to stop creating quagmires around the world.

---

### Pam Rasmussen says

This book would have gotten a lot higher rating from me than two stars if I had read just the first and last chapters. They are definitely worthwhile, maybe even "must reading." But the intervening chapters are way too tediously detailed for anyone who does not have an intense interest in the history of Sudan.

The objective of Saviors & Survivors is to debunk the myths propagated by the Save Darfur movement, replacing them with the much-more-complicated reality. While many in the movement claim that Darfur's blacks are victims of Arab sadism, the truth of the matter is that there are no such "pure" populations in Sudan, and there are atrocities aplenty on both sides of the divide. Moreover, Mamdani concludes that advocates of international intervention are not acting with the best interests of the Sudanese at heart, but rather those of the super powers on the UN Security Council.

---

### Megan says

I learned tons about the history of Sudan, the idealist anti terrorism movement, the Save Darfur movement and its weaknesses and politics, and his opinion of the truth about the complexity of the Sudan conflict. As the commentary below notes, Darfur is just the author's example for his bigger argument that comes out at the end. Perhaps read the final chapter first and then dive in...? Definitely worth the time and effort to read.

Here's an interesting critique of his book. I look forward to reading something that argues that the word "genocide" does apply to Darfur.

<http://www.sudanreeves.org/files/Mamd...>

---

## **Rob Prince says**

Sometime a few years ago, Iraq anti-war groups on college campuses seemed to evaporate and in their place sprouted - virtually everywhere - 'Save Darfur' Committees. I have always been rather skeptical about this latter movement, wondering what it is about. Mahmood Mamdani - an African scholar from Uganda teaching at Columbia University - has written a number of important books, on population control, Rwanda and now Darfur. This Darfur book is not easy reading, but so what? It is a carefully written book that challenges the prevailing views about the situation in Darfur, arguing that while there is certainly a civil war unfolding there, that it is far from the kind of genocide oft claimed. I will be using this book as a key source in a number of upcoming articles.

---

## **Keith Hales says**

Mahmood Mamdani looks to every single event in Sudanese history to reinforce his claim that there is no genocide in Darfur. His approach is tedious, his writing is overwhelmingly boring. If all books were this difficult to read there would be no readers.

---

## **Kevin says**

My review from: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/darfur/2009/04/...>

What Does Darfur Have To Do With The "War On Terror"?

posted by Kevin Funk

A renowned scholar and commentator on African affairs and U.S. foreign policy, Mahmood Mamdani's views have attracted considerable criticism from across the political spectrum. In particular, his analysis of the Robert Mugabe government of Zimbabwe has drawn ire from both the right and left, with some contending that he is downplaying the crimes of the Mugabe regime. With his new book's aim of cutting Western media and activist portrayals of the Darfur conflict down to size, and formulating a fresh, historically-grounded narrative about its causes, will Mamdani's *Saviors and Survivors* prompt him to be labeled an apologist for Omar al-Bashir's regime as well?

Despite his pull-no-punches style, *Saviors and Survivors* seems to have achieved the impressive feat of not automatically turning off everyone it criticizes. Both the *New York Times* and the *New Republic*, which have been at or least near the forefront of the simplistic moralizing about Darfur that Mamdani rightfully despises, have run generally favorable reviews of the book - suggesting perhaps an opening in mainstream discourse for alternative views on Darfur. So what does *Saviors and Survivors* bring to the table?

Mamdani spends slightly more than half of the book engaging in an extensive deconstruction of the formation of "African" vs. "Arab" and "native" vs. "settler" identities in Darfur and Sudan. This leads to his thesis that the current Darfur conflict actually "began as a localized civil war (1987-89) and turned into a rebellion" - a clash between landed "natives" and landless "settlers" in Darfur that was fueled by the British

colonial legacy of retribalization, environmental degradation, an influx of weapons due to the Cold War, and, finally, “a brutal counterinsurgency” waged by Khartoum (p. 4).

The merits of these particular conclusions will have to be properly evaluated by academic specialists – and indeed, some of Mamdani’s arguments have been challenged by distinguished Sudan researchers such as the historian Martin Daly. Nevertheless, the rest of *Saviors and Survivors*, more incendiary in tone, sees Mamdani wielding these historical arguments, as well as an extensive bibliography of source material, to launch a withering attack on Save Darfur activism.

Though the words may seem harsh when applied to a movement rife with high-schoolers, Mamdani’s formulation that “Save Darfur activists combine a contemptuous attitude toward knowing with an imperative to act” seems a fair characterization of Save Darfur’s national leadership and most visible celebrity-activist supporters (6). One is reminded of one of Save Darfur’s most prominent public faces, the actress Mia Farrow, commenting that activists should “Leave it to the [U.S.:] government to decide how to best help the people of Darfur,” and instead focus their efforts more blandly on “let[ing:] them know you want to help.” It is a sad day for Darfurians when hordes of U.S. activists attempt to “save” them by blindly trusting, and indeed empowering Washington to exert itself in the region in whatever way it sees fit – including militarily. Such advocacy is not in the interest of the victims, but rather, serves to buttress U.S. foreign policy aims (hence Mamdani’s constant invocations of the “War on Terror”), which are far from humanitarian.

Clearly then, as Mamdani posits, something is amiss in Darfur activism. As he notes after reviewing the oft-inflated death tolls for the conflict, “Ironically, the first international outcry [about Darfur:] arose at almost the same time as the dramatic reduction in the level of fatalities,” and likewise, “The rhetoric of the Save Darfur movement in the United States escalated as the level of mortality in Darfur declined” (33). This coincided with “a major public campaign, involving Save Darfur and key Western governments, to have the African Union [force in Darfur:] replaced by the United Nations” (41-42). So what accounts for the gap between Save Darfur’s rhetoric and the facts on the ground in Darfur – the region that is to be “saved”?

Mamdani is right to frame his analysis of the political economy of the Darfur conflict in the U.S. with the dominant paradigm of our times, the so-called “War on Terror.” Calling Save Darfur somewhat vaguely “the humanitarian face of the War on Terror,” he notes a shared “feel-good imperative” behind the two themes, in which it is not the suffering peoples in the countries we are said to be seeking to liberate that matters, but rather the projection of Western power (6). More precisely, as is the case with the War on Terror, Mamdani boils Save Darfur’s logic of salvation down to what is euphemistically called a Western military intervention – that is, an invasion of Sudan (47).

While this used to be an explicit goal of at least parts of the Save Darfur movement, activists have largely shied away from this position in recent times, at least in public. Though Save Darfur continues to call for an “intervention” as a solution to the conflict, sustaining Mamdani’s characterization of a Western invasion as a continued position of Save Darfur, and indeed its “central political thrust,” would require examining a more contemporary batch of sources than the ones he cites (47) – or, as Rebecca Hamilton notes in her contribution to the debate, interviewing some of the figures involved. In fact, in its push for an “intervention” in Sudan, Save Darfur has been perhaps deliberately coy about this point, as its usage of the term “intervention” seems to leave the door open to potentially supporting a U.S.- or Western-led invasion of Sudan, while on a more benign level it could be read to mean nothing more than support for UN and AU peacekeepers.

In seeking to explain why “All have been seduced to abandon their political dogmas and bathe in the moral glow of a global humanitarian cause that highlights the plight of some of the most wretched of our fellow humans,” (52) Mamdani poses a highly pertinent question – why is this cause Darfur and not Iraq?

Of course, as citizens of the invading and occupying power in Iraq, we bear direct moral responsibility for

the death and destruction in that country, in a way that we simply do not for Darfur. We should undoubtedly feel sympathy for Darfurians, and be in solidarity with them in seeking to address the causes of their suffering, though basic moral calculus indicates that our guide for action should lead us to focus our limited energy as activists on addressing humanitarian crises based on both their severity, and also our power to actually be able to do something about them.

Though comparing mortality figures may seem a grim exercise, the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq has exacted a death toll surely several times higher than the Darfur conflict, as Mamdani reviews. Further, it is axiomatic that as U.S. citizens, our power to lessen the suffering in Iraq – by, say, withdrawing U.S. troops, in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the Iraqi population – is undeniably greater than is the case for Darfur.

To make the case that U.S. activists have been taken in by Darfur’s “moral glow” while ignoring our destruction of Iraq, Mamdani notes that “The most powerful mobilization in New York City – where I have lived for the larger part of the year since 1999 – was for Darfur, not Iraq.” As he does, one would of course “expect[:] the reverse,” if basic humanitarian principles were indeed at play (59).

However, as I have argued elsewhere, based on my own careful review of media reports, Darfur rallies have not come even close to approaching the numbers of participants drawn by the largest protests against the war in Iraq. In fact, for what may have been the most publicized and attended Save Darfur rally on record – which took place on April 30, 2006, in Washington, DC – media reports generally put the size of the crowd in the “thousands.” In contrast, an anti-war protest in New York City, which occurred just days before, drew what even corporate media sources conceded was many times more – “tens of thousands” of people.

Anyone who follows news about Darfur will find their inbox bursting forth on a daily basis with stories of high-school and college students trying to “save” Darfur – but to therefore accept this notion that Darfur activism has more support than anti-war activism, based on corporate media coverage, serves to validate the bias that underlies their selection of stories. Save Darfur surely has a more developed activist infrastructure than the movement against the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and for obvious reasons receives favorable media coverage and sizable donations from major corporations while anti-war groups do not. Yet to attribute the elite’s bias against anti-war activism to the population at large simply does not seem to accord with the facts as we know them. One might instead draw the conclusion that the number of people in the U.S. opposing the war in Iraq has been relatively impressive given the near total dearth of substantive critiques of its true motives in mainstream discourse, as well as the usual ludicrous denunciations of “anti-Americanism” hurled at any figures who have felt even tempted to undertake such a project.

What is undoubtedly true, however, is that the political and media elite focus on Darfur as a region to be “saved,” while not doing the same for Iraq (or other crises of our making, such as Palestine or Afghanistan). This fixation on Darfur is not a coincidence, in Mamdani’s estimation. He notes that:

Perhaps Save Darfur should be credited with...depoliticizing Americans, especially those Americans who felt a need to do something in the face of disasters perpetrated by the Bush administration. The Save Darfur Coalition was able to capture and tame a part of this potentially rebellious constituency – especially students – thereby marginalizing and overshadowing those who continued to mobilize around Iraq. This successful displacement was indeed a model campaign, a successful lesson in depoliticization. (60)

Unlike the disaster of our making in Iraq, then, “Darfur is a place of refuge...It is a cause about which they can feel good” (62). Since the Save Darfur campaign limply calls on the U.S. to “do something” to address a conflict in which we are not the ones holding the guns, it is palatable to the establishment in ways that a campaign to end the occupation of Iraq or terminate U.S. arms shipments to Israel is not. Though it is unclear if Mamdani is arguing that Save Darfur set out to deliberately “capture and tame” insufficiently docile segments of the population, it does to some extent seem to have had this effect – a disastrous outcome at a

time when the U.S. (not to mention its victims across the globe) could have benefited greatly from the emergence of more vibrant anti-imperialist social movements than what anti-war activism has been able to muster.

The point is hardly that we should be ignoring Darfur – rather, as Mamdani proscribes, we should act, but based on a careful understanding of the relevant facts. In this, the principle of solidarity must be at the forefront; that is, we should listen to the people on the ground, and not impose solutions from without.

In this vein, Saviors and Survivors could have benefited from additional source material from internal Darfurian and Sudanese opposition parties and movements. A fuller airing of their views would have given Darfur activists, whose campaigns Mamdani has critiqued rather perceptively, more of a basis (should they be seeking one) for righting their ships and launching a movement that stands in solidarity with Darfurians instead of for “saving” them.

At some points, word choice will likely open Mamdani to criticism. Mimicking the regrettable and ubiquitous logic of “anti-Americanism,” he notes that Save Darfur is on an “anti-China campaign,” and that “China claimed that the priority in Darfur was a negotiated settlement, and all powers needed to invest their energies to make this outcome possible” (51). Though factually correct, is China’s call sincere enough to merely repeat at face value? Further, is “counterinsurgency” a profound enough term to adequately describe the Sudanese government’s role in the Darfur conflict? (47)

These quibbles aside, Saviors and Survivors serves as a valuable warning against forcing the Darfur conflict into our ready-made “War on Terror” stencil – a convenient storyline for the West in which a nefarious Chinese-backed Arab cabal in Khartoum is perpetrating an ongoing genocide against the helpless and ready-to-be-saved Darfurian Africans. By advocating such an interpretation of the conflict, Darfur activists and commentators are allowing Darfur to be “not just an illustration of the grand narrative of the War on Terror but also a part of its justification.” (71) In his analysis of Save Darfur, Mamdani’s is an invaluable contribution in allowing us to understand Darfur in its own right, free from the ideological baggage of our time.

---

## **Abdosh Ahmed says**

An intricate overview of the crises faced in the west of Sudan; Darfur State. Exposing the propaganda behind the sudden international interests of the crises only for it to be exposed in a misconceived approach, while it underlines the actual story and history through firsthand experience and through carefully analyzing the facts and outweighing the truth. Definitely worth a read.

---

## **Drew says**

Mahmood Mamdani has written another incisive book. This time, he turns his gaze towards the conflict in Darfur, Sudan. Looking through the lens of an academic and analyst, he sees the shades of gray that were obliterated by activists starting around 2003-04. He writes that as the activist program swelled, especially in the form of the Save Darfur coalition, the violence in Darfur actually fell. He looks at the greater picture, historicizing the situation, looking at the political, moral and economic forces that were in motion around the violence in this location. He locates it within the colonial project as well as ever evolving international humanitarian framework.

Mamdani's analysis regarding the Save Darfur is particularly pointed for me. I worked in DC for an NGO on the Darfur issue from early 2004 through the end of 2006. My organization was on the original advisory board for Save Darfur. I started working this issue as an intern, fresh out of my graduate anthropology program where I had written my thesis on the genocides in Rwanda and Guatemala. My first take at writing action alerts, mobilizing our members and engaging leaders on Capitol Hill drew the conflict in its proper shades of gray, actually quite like what Mamdani does here. My superiors and others in the NGO community rejected that analysis and preferred the black & white approach that still reigns today. In some ways, activism requires a stark choice between A and B in order to get people mobilized. This is especially true today when so many issues vie for one's attention and so little time is given to analyzing the facts and broad scope of an issue.

I liked Mamdani's playing with popular phrase that came out of a 2005 summit at the UN regarding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). This concept says that states have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. If a state fails in this regard, the international community must intervene in order to stop the violence. Mamdani titles his conclusion to this book as "Responsibility to Protect or Right to Punish." While a play on words, it strikes true. What defines violence and who gets to inject themselves into whom are in fact, perhaps sadly, political not moral decisions.

Mamdani includes a thread on how this shift from finding peace and justice to armed intervention is related to the War on Terror. He writes that "There is nothing new in the use of legal concepts to serve the expedience of great powers. What is new about the War on Terror is that the action against violence is simultaneously being moralized and legally deregulated" (p. 281). While I feel I understand his thread linking the changes in approach to humanitarian assistance vs. intervention and the War on Terror, I think he could have spent more time fleshing this out. Perhaps he could have written a separate chapter to explore it. I think he's got it but the argument doesn't stand up as well as his others in the book.

He also discusses the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its flaws. The ICC has seemed to be a way for Western powers, and especially the UN Security Council (UNSC), to try African crimes against humanity. The ICC has not focused on Western violence nor on both sides in a conflict. It seems more a court of political whim rather than of justice. This is true due to the ability of the UNSC to continually postpone an investigation or refer investigations to the ICC itself. He notes that the ICC treaty "provided escape routes for those accused of serious crimes but with clout in the U.N. body" (p. 287). Mamdani is clear, however, when he writes that "My point is not that those tried by the ICC have not committed crimes, including mass murder, but that the law is being applied selectively" (p. 284).

While I agree with his analysis of the ICC, he cites the example of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as the better, or even best, way to proceed when dealing with peace, justice and moving on after violence. In my thesis, I wrote "Both Hayner (2001) and Wilson (2001) suggest that truth commissions have been used not to address the needs of the victim and perpetrator communities, but to shore up international legitimacy." [For more information, please see Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocities*; Richard A Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State*; and Drew J. Asson, *Never Again: Struggling for Humanness in Post-Conflict Rwanda and Guatemala*, M.A. degree in Public Anthropology thesis (2003).]

Overall, this is a valuable book that offers detailed analysis of the situation in Darfur, Sudan, Africa and the international community.

---

## Amy says

Saviors and Survivors is either too long or too short. It begins with a fascinating and well argued critique of the Save Darfur movement which succeeds at being convincing without being smug and suffers only from a slight tendency towards repetition. This part is well worth reading for anyone, regardless of their level of knowledge of Sudan or Darfur, and could have worked as a book in itself.

One of Mamdani's main critiques of the Save Darfur movement is that its members sought to get their government involved in the conflict without ever really understanding its background and context. So the main part of the book is Mamdani's effort to establish that context. It's a noble goal, but (and I'm speaking as someone with minimal previous knowledge of the history of Sudan and Darfur) all it did was leave me confused. Despite making up most of the book, this part is just too short to adequately convey the sheer complexity and scale of the history it is trying to relate. It covers the history of Sudan from the pre-colonial to 2000's conflict, and the history itself speeds by even as the book itself becomes very slow going. It is not helped by many jumps back and forth in time. I suspect someone with a background in Sudanese history would have found it much more comprehensible, but that person probably doesn't need the context it is trying to convey. This section also contains a lot of discussion about the development of ideas of race and ethnicity, settler and native, and Arab and non-Arab in Sudan. This is all interesting stuff, but it is once again hard to understand because the limited space of the book just doesn't give enough space to truly explain it in full. The thing is, I keep complaining about space (the text itself, without references, is 300 pages in hardcover), and what space there is is limited even more by the incredible amount of repetition that occurs. I suspect this was an attempt to bring important concepts home, but despite it I was still confused throughout.

The conclusion is a broader discussion of the politics of humanitarianism, with Mamdani arguing that this represents a new form of paternalism that smacks of colonialism and denies those in states targeted for potential intervention the rights of citizens.

I highly recommend the first part of the book, but if you are looking to understand the conflict in Darfur it might be best to seek clear context elsewhere.

---

## Travis Lupick says

Examining the conflict in Sudan, Mahmood Mamdani doesn't shy away from controversy. By page 5 of his unsettling but fascinating new book Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War on Terror, he has compared the scale of the catastrophe in Darfur to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. On the following page, Mamdani—a professor at Columbia University who divides his time between New York and his birth country of Uganda—describes the Save Darfur movement as “the humanitarian face of the War on Terror”. By the end of Chapter 1, readers will likely be questioning everything they thought they knew about what is commonly referred to as the world's “greatest humanitarian crisis”, including the accuracy of that label. Mamdani's Saviors and Survivors is thoroughly researched and, for the most part, filled with tight arguments that comprise a complex history of Darfur. Mamdani successfully shreds the simplistic narrative of the conflict as a government-backed Arab war on innocent black Africans.

The intense “racialization of identities” that has taken place in Sudan has its roots in the British colonial period, Mamdani writes. Today's conflict began in 1987 as an intertribal war between Arab camel nomads and settled Fur tribes. The causes, the author explains, were environmental degradation and climate change, which forced Arab tribes onto what was historically other groups' lands. Later, the four-decade-long civil war in neighbouring Chad injected the conflict with more warriors and many more guns. In 2003, Sudan's central government, led by Omar al-Bashir, began a brutal counterinsurgency against Darfur's non-Arabs

that finally caught the world's attention. In light of this tangled history, Mamdani asks, is it just to charge al-Bashir with conspiracy to commit a crime as severe as genocide?

Provocative as it is, *Saviors and Survivors* is the work of an academic and may leave some people bogged down in detail. Mamdani spends the better part of a chapter defining the word Arab, and then delivers a detailed history of Darfur going as far back as the 16th century. Casual readers may grow impatient while waiting for discussion of contemporary events.

Regardless, *Saviors and Survivors* will likely prompt a rethinking of the accepted discourse on Darfur. Mamdani lays out the largely unexplored complexities of the conflict and asks some very tough questions that deserve debate.

---

### **Sarah Aljar says**

Dispels all myths about the war on Darfur, how colonialism built on institutionalized discrimination on ethnic & tribal lines that led to the ensuing civil war, and later with the Islamist split the insurgency and counterinsurgency. It explains how Darfur became militarized by the neighboring civil war in Chad, and interestingly how the Zaghawa tribes influenced Idriss Deby the hitherto president of Chad, himself a Zaghawa, to participate in the insurgency against the government of Khartoum when previously he was a Khartoum-ally. It counterposes the idea of victor's justice with survivor's justice and how each have been selectively applied in History. It reexamines the language, statistics, and endeavors used by the international players in Darfur in response to the violence, and how those endeavors were politicized to fit external agendas abandoning internal reform & reconciliation for a military solution. The book views the conflict objectively and in an intensely engaging manner. Highly recommended & an indispensable book for anyone who is interested in understanding the situation in Darfur.

---

### **Sara-Maria Sorentino says**

I was fortunate enough to hear Mamdani speak not too long ago. He is a captivating orator--careful with his words and illuminating with his stories. His analysis of Darfur, here and elsewhere ([http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mamd01\\_....](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n05/mamd01_....)) resounds with penetrating clarity much needed in the heyday of Save Darfur's self-delusion. The third clause in the subtitle of this book is but a hint of Mamdani's bold linkages seldom admitted elsewhere.

preliminary cautionary note: I found his talk of citizenship and sovereignty to be somewhat convoluted-- he comes across in several places as an odd sort of nationalist. I will defer to my admiration and trust of Mamdani until I read his *Citizen and Subject*, which I'm guessing will help me in these matters.

This book, Mamdani says, is 'an argument against those who substitute moral certainty for knowledge, and who feel virtuous even when acting on the basis of total ignorance.' and the argument has a direct target:

Only those possessed of disproportionate power can afford to assume that knowing is irrelevant, thereby caring little about the consequences of their actions. Not only is this mind-set the driving force behind the War on Terror, it also provides the self-indulgent motto of the human rights interventionist recruited into the ranks of the terror warriors...It is this shared mind-set that has turned the movement to Save Darfur into the humanitarian face of the War on Terror....

Even if we must act on imperfect knowledge, we must never act as if knowing is no longer relevant (6).

This ethical injunction is, I think, one I could get behind.

The rallying cry around ‘genocide’, in the case of Darfur, is only made possible through an absence of knowledge. If genocide is defined as ‘killing with an intent to eliminate an entire group’ (3), then the conflict in Darfur can definitively not be termed as such. This is arguably Mamdani’s most controversial intervention in the debate. And not only does he challenge this seemingly unquestionable perception, that of near of unending racial violence, but by investigating the political implications for historical narrative that renders the labeling of genocide possible, he accounts for how and why this act of naming came into being. What is the significance, for example, of ex-prez Bush’s accusation against the government of Sudan of genocide, the first government historically to level that charge against another? What purpose could such an act serve in relation to other US political objectives? What does it mean when ubiquitous advertisements, produced by highly funded media campaign, stress the urgency of our need to intervene, now, today? What is the appeal of these moralistic narratives? Why the mass mobilization around this issue? Why now, especially when African violence is typically relegated to back pages in tiny print?

Near universal condemnation for genocide, Mamdani argues, has a strange effect: in contrast to brutality of unimaginable proportions ‘counter-insurgency and war appear to be normal developments’. War is hence ‘taken as an inevitable if regrettable part of defending or asserting national sovereignty, domestically or internationally’ (279). Power gives itself the honorable role of labeling horror, for extraordinary categories are needed in order to obfuscate power’s constitutive violence. The result, in our current geopolitical situation, is this:

the astonishing spectacle of the United States, which has authored the violence in Iraq, branding an adversary state, Sudan, which has authored the violence in Darfur, as the perpetrator of genocide. Even more astonishing, we have a citizens’ movement in America calling for a humanitarian intervention while keeping mum about the violence in Iraq. And yet...the figures for the number of excess dead are far higher for Iraq than for Darfur. The numbers of violent deaths as a proportion of excess mortality are also higher in Iraq than in Darfur (279).

Way to go mamdani, huh?! good god i want to cheer him on and on. what a fucking mess. The politics of naming here coincide with the politics of numeration as pundits plaster alarmist statistics as far as their moralism will take them (in what seems to be the paradigmatic characteristic of the fatality-crier from the West, see somalia, the campaign for military intervention is hyped as the numbers of deaths decrease dramatically). And so the framing of the matter works to bolster support for the War on Terror. It does this, as the above quote shows, on several levels. First, the inflated sense of violence elsewhere functions a valve to siphon the energies and the guilt of US citizens, of all stars and stripes, away from a war in which they, as citizens, are more directly culpable. The appeal to intervention in Darfur is couched in apolitical terms, appealing to a moral compass in which the coordinates are clear, thereby rendering considerations of complicity irrelevant; ‘Americans can feel themselves to be what they know they are not in Iraq: powerful saviors’ (62). And Americans seemed well-placed to take the bait, being a country characterized, Mamdani observes, by generosity in the form of charity and stinginess at tax time. This need for a philanthropic self-perception must be great, for mass movements of the sort not seen since Vietnam have coalesced around Save Darfur’s high finance mobilization efforts: people throng through the streets with mass produced placard, advertisements for immediate intervention jam our airwaves, and STAND chapters blossom on all campuses, including my alma mater (see the flower of indignation bloom in most peculiar ways: <http://icprogressivealliance.com/2009...> ). Darfur becomes not only interpreted through language conducive to the War on Terror’s misdirection efforts but in turn becomes justification for the war. As decontextualization of the conflict in Darfur (made possible by Save’s moral appeals) frames the conflict in a neat racial binary--the threatening barbaric Arabs committing genocide against the passive savage African--the Arabs involved can be quite easily marked as terrorist. “the more thoroughly Darfur was integrated into the War on Terror, the more the depoliticized violence in Darfur acquired a racialized description: a

‘genocide’ perpetrated by ‘Arabs’ upon ‘Africans’” (64).

If this is the story those in power are trying to tell, Mamdani tells a different one-- one that effectively, I think, undermines this official narrative. To do so, he challenges the pivotal Arab v African assumption around which the charge of genocide rests and the whole ball gets rolling. Mamdani poses the question: who is an Arab (104-8)? To what do members appeal in the process of claiming Arabic heritage—language, religion, race, culture? Mamdani answers that being an Arab is a political identity. Although Mamdani doesn’t say outright how politics are differentiated from all these things, language, religion, culture, etc., I think the following pointed quote is an adequate indication of what he means: ‘Genealogy is less a historical claim about migration and more a contemporary acknowledgement of a common political association...Its starting point is not the dead but the living, not ancestors but the present generation. It thus claims a common past for those linked together in the present’ (107). Tracing back ones ancestors to Muhammad’s lineage is a process of identity seeking with reference to the current configurations of ones surroundings. So it is, perhaps, with all relations to history, and Mamdani’s historical retelling is no different. So-called Arabization, he details (and it should be clear for what purpose), is a historical process in Sudan that reflects more an internal ‘mark of assertion’ than a sign of mass migration or the coming of hordes of wise strangers from the sandy beyond, as conventional histories suggest. Rather, the migratory Arab nomads, West African pilgrims and peasants and slaves from the south—three groups that characterize the large migratory populations in Sudanese history—more or less assimilated to local cultures in Sudanese regions. It wasn’t until around the 16th century that the Funj sultanate began to see itself as Arab and the 18th century that the middle class merchants began to assert an Arab identity for commercial purposes.

During colonial rule, however, these identities were forced to solidify around the question of land rights. The practice of divide and conquer becomes in colonial times ‘reidentify and rule’ (146). Native administration and indirect rule as pseudo-systems of governance were made possible through the process of organizing strict categories of Settler and Native based on tribe. The central objective in this process of retribalization, argues Mamdani, is marginalize the influences of the Mahdiyya revolutionary movement of the late 19th century. Mahdism continued the Sultanates’ centralizing processes of unifying eastern and western Sudan. And the North and the South were further separated in the 1920s as a defense against the Egyptian Revolution and later Egyptian nationalism following WWII, and the more general fear of a spread of Arabic. This divide was essentially an administrative category but, given the privileged position afforded to those termed ‘native’, the granting of ‘customary’ land rights and participatory governmental access, the categories of the census, as it were, ‘developed teeth’, ‘turning tribe from a benign administrative identity into a basis for discriminating against one group of colonized and in favor of another’ (152). As the meaning of “dar” or home narrowed to mean specific plots of earth, land became an asset imbricated in the formation of political identity. ‘Multiple and overlapping rights’—a matter of the highest importance, especially when the majority is constituted by overlapping identities--were discounted as a possibility except, he says ‘in a hierarchical sense.’ (237) Each administrative unit contained the seeds of institutionalized ethnic discrimination: ‘Superimposing a grid of ethnically defined dars on a multiethnic population was a recipe for an explosive confrontation between two kinds of residents in every dar: those with and those without political and land rights. The rest was only a matter of time’ (168-9).

The dynamism of ethnic and tribal groupings, gutted and guided by colonial administrative apparatus, should make clear that what is justified in the name of tradition, or relegated to the backwaters of eternal tribal conflict, is actually something that arose concomitantly with modernization. The effects of these policies are far-reaching and Mamdani details how the following interrelated processes are effected by and respond to colonialisms identity strangle-hold: the politics of State Arabization in the late 50s and 60s, the deepening separation between the North and the South, the Nimeiry regime’s challenge of indirect rule through failed implementation of reforms, Cold War proxy wars of Reagan’s US and Qaddafi’s Libya, the Sahelian drought as an important factor both in heightening debates over access to resources and in the large population of Chadian refugees, the militarization of Chadian refugees and the Darfur region, the Islamists support of dar-

less tribes in the 90s, the split between al-Bashir and Turabi, all leading up to the 1987-89 civil war. This conflict he argues, took place through an increasingly polarizing native-settler paradigm inherited from colonialism and exacerbated with continued external interference. Each group, those with dar defending their customary rights and the darless claiming rights to resources as 'citizens', claimed victimization: The Arab tribes as 'victims of a Fur-sponsored drive to rid the land of Arab settlers' (232) and the Fur 'as victims of a supremacist Arab dialogue' (233). 'The more they saw themselves as victims with little control over this rapidly unraveling situation, the more both sides tended to slide into an exclusionary rhetoric that inevitably opened them to outside influences that further racialized and inflamed the discourse' (245). Mamdani of course goes into detail about the origins of the SLA and the JEM, the governments counterinsurgency movement's increasing militarization and association with the Janjawiid, and the naivete of the negotiations. The more recent history stuff is pretty thoroughly examined, always through the following frame: 'Local tensions arise from the colonial system and the nationalist failure to reform it; regional and global tensions arise from the Cold War and the War on Terror' (12).

so. Humanitarian intervention works alongside the War on Terror, both requiring a righteous subjects and precarious relations between law and power. 'The responsibility to protect' is essentially 'a right to punish but without being held accountable—a clarion call for the recolonization of 'failed' states in Africa. In its present form, the call for justice is really a slogan that masks a big power agenda to recolonize africa' (300). Consequently doing good, being a good person is only made possible by a double (or is it triple/quadruple/infinately dexterous) denial: the near complete decontextualization of other's histories in Darfur, and the ignore-ance of both one's current role as invader in Iraq and the future role as neo-imperialist in Darfur. The question to be asking is this: 'who has the responsibility to protect whom under what conditions and towards what end?' (276).

---

## Rushay Booysen says

Mahmood Mamdani view on the Darfur crisis,while it carried alot of valid points from a Africa point of view.We just lost one of the men that influenced alot of whats happening in that region (Mr Ghadaffi) lets hope the African Union becomes more than a dummy union.the book had its good points but became too lengthy at times

---

## Ktb5t says

This is my second try at this one. We'll see if I can muster through it before the library wants it back.

OK, after maxing out my library renewal limit, I finished it. I can't give a detailed rehearsal of all the arguments made in this book, but I think it's fair to say that the point is that (1) Darfur is really effing complicated, due to a lot of colonial history that is poorly understood by activists in the West, and (2) that it's not true to characterize the conflict as a genocidal war waged by the government against black non-Muslims by Muslim janjawiid militias. It's more of a nasty internal war between tribes with homelands (divvied up by the British during the colonial era) and those without, that's gotten tangled up with an insurgency and a counter-insurgency. All I knew about Darfur before is what I read in the papers (and the emails from the Save Darfur coalition, which comes in for a lot of criticism from Mamdani), so I learned something here.

## **M says**

Mamdani takes the crisis in Darfur and provides historical and cultural context. Very interesting read, with a different perspective on whether genocide has occurred in Darfur. Highly recommended if the politics and history of Sudan are of interest to you.

---