

Geopolitics and visuality: Sighting the Darfur conflict[☆]

David Campbell*

Department of Geography, Durham University, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK

Abstract

In the many considerations of visual culture in geography, there are few works concerned with the visual culture of contemporary geopolitics. In seeking to rectify this lacuna, this paper outlines elements of a research project to consider the way visuality is a pivotal assemblage in the production of contemporary geopolitics. Signalling the need for a conceptual exploration of the importance of vision and visuality to all forms of knowledge (rather than just those associated with or manifested in specific visual artefacts like pictures), the paper argues that understanding the significance of visuality for geopolitics involves recasting visual culture as visual economy. This enables the constitutive relations of geopolitics and visuality to shift from the *social construction of the visual field* to the *visual performance of the social field*. This argument is illustrated through an examination of some of the documentary photography and photojournalism covering the most recent outbreak of war in Darfur, Sudan, beginning in the summer of 2003. Exploring the tension in these pictures between the established disaster iconography of ‘Africa’ and the desire to image genocidal violence and war crimes, considering in particular the way photography captures identity, the argument concludes with reflections on the way the visual performance of the social field that is Darfur structures our encounters with others.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Geopolitics; Visuality; Photojournalism; Identity; Darfur

[☆] In Political Geography 26, 1, we were pleased to publish Jacques Levy’s Political Geography Plenary Lecture 2006, which was presented in March 2006 at the Chicago meeting of the Association of American Geographers. In view of the interest and attendance in Chicago, the Editors decided to organize a similar Plenary Lecture event at the August 2006 meeting of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) in London. We are pleased to publish that Plenary here.

* Tel.: +44 191 334 1800; fax: +44 191 334 1801.

E-mail address: david.campbell@durham.ac.uk

Introduction

Everyday life in world politics is replete with images and policy makers are attuned to their power. Speaking at the World Press Photo 50th anniversary in 2005, the UN Secretary General's special representative for Sudan linked the world's lack of concern about Darfur with an absence of photographic witnesses and called on photojournalists to produce more pictures as part of the struggle for attention and action in Darfur (Pronk, 12 January 2006). Jan Pronk's call echoed the conclusion of Romeo Dallaire, the UN commander in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, that a journalistic line to Western audiences was worth a battalion on the ground (Power, 2002: 355). Yet the study of world politics has not properly grasped the significance of visual culture, where it refers to the practices and representations

“which circulate in the field of vision establishing visibilities (and policing invisibilities), stereotypes, power relations, the ability to know and to verify...” (Rogoff, 2000: 20).

To be sure, Geography has been called a visual discipline, and research on cartography, landscape, and geographic information systems is prominent (Rose, 2003). Equally, within Politics and International Relations the place of media imagery in global politics has been analysed. However, in neither Geography nor Politics/International Relations are there many studies concerned with the visual culture of contemporary geopolitics (cf. Campbell & Shapiro, *in press*; Luke & O Tuathail, 1997; McDonald, Dodds, & Hughes, *in press*; Mirzeoff, 2005; Power & Crampton, 2005), and little research that takes documentary photography and photojournalism to be important technologies in the visual production of contemporary geopolitics (cf. Ryan, 1997 on 19th century photography and empire).

Visual imagery is of particular importance for geopolitics because it is one of the principal ways in which news from distant places is brought home, constructing the notion of ‘home’ in this process. Ever since early explorers made a habit of taking cameras on their travels, photographs have provided much basic information about the people and places encountered on those journeys. Much like cartography, these images contributed to the development of an “imagined geography” in which the dichotomies of West/East, civilized/barbaric, North/South and developed/underdeveloped have been prominent (Gregory, 1995; Said, 1979). Since the advent of technology for moving images (i.e. film, television, video and, most recently, digital technologies), much ‘foreign’ news has centred on disaster, with stories about disease, famine, war and death prominent contrasts to the relative stability of the ‘domestic’ realm they are directed at (Moeller, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to offer an initial statement of a research project that is very much in progress. This project will explore the way visuality, in the form of photography as a technology of visualization (Maynard, 1997), is pivotal to the production of contemporary geopolitics. This requires an understanding of photography generally, but the project will focus on the photographic genres which document and report on global events.

The first section sets out some of the conceptual questions surrounding visuality that a project of this kind must engage. Four research questions animate this overall project: first, how can visuality be theorized as a specific form of knowledge? Second, what are the implications of a philosophical account of visuality for our understanding of photography generally? Third, how can documentary photography and photojournalism be understood as a technology of visuality that establishes the conditions of possibility for geopolitics? Fourth, how has documentary photography and photojournalism as a geopolitical technology of visuality problematized

Sudan – in particular (as explored in this paper), the current conflict in Darfur – and affected ethical and political responsibility?

Exploring photography's role in the historical production of Sudan will locate these conceptual questions in a specific geopolitical location. As Africa's largest country, the site of its longest running conflict and a place subject to a range of interventions from the 19th century colonial period under the British to 21st century concern about war crimes in Darfur, Sudan offers a rich case for examining the historical construction of 'Africa' in the European imagination. Drawing on prior linguistic articulations of the continent as a site of cultural, moral and spatial difference, the contemporary visual performance of 'Africa' through reportage from sites like Sudan more often than not reduces the plurality and hybridity of the continent and its people to a single entity marked by an iconography of despair, disaster and disease. This enactment renders those places as objects of colonialism, imperialism, military intervention and humanitarianism.

A full account of the photographic production of Sudan is obviously beyond the scope of a paper such as this. Nonetheless, as a means of partly substantiating some of the conceptual propositions, this paper will provide an analysis of how photojournalism – in the form of news photographs used by *The Guardian* and *The Observer* newspapers in the UK from 2003 to 2005 – has pictorially performed the conflict in Darfur. After the conceptual overview and brief methodological discussion of this photographic analysis in [Conceptual issues, Darfur – the political context of conflict](#) examines the political context of the conflict in Darfur, drawing attention to the way coverage of the conflict was linked to particular events and understandings. The paper then offers a quantitative and qualitative discussion of the news photographs that were used in the two-year period under consideration, comparing them to other sets of images. This analysis suggests photojournalism has helped captured the violence of Darfur within two competing narratives. This visual enactment of Darfur does not simply reflect geopolitics; it is itself geopolitical, both manifesting and enabling power relations that distance difference, leaving us with the challenge of how our mediated encounters with others can be better handled.

Conceptual issues

This project is inspired by W. J. T. Mitchell's (2002: 175) admonition that in many analyses of visual culture there is too often

“an unfortunate tendency to slide back into reductive treatments of visual images as all-powerful forces and to engage in a kind of iconoclastic critique which imagines that the destruction or exposure of false images amounts to a political victory.”

Avoiding a reductive iconoclasm requires a comprehensive philosophical investigation of visibility with respect to geopolitics, something that is yet to be comprehensively achieved in either Geography or Politics/International Relations. To be sure, there have been important beginnings in this conversation. McDonald's (2006) analysis of the relationship between geopolitics and visibility, located in the story of a Cold War episode of weapons testing in Britain, and written in part as a response to what he sees as Rose's (2003) call for a more empirical form of geographical inquiry into visual culture, is significant for its discussion of “observant practice” as a way to conceptually resituate the analysis of visual culture. However, Rose's review is notable for its claim that with very few exceptions the visual has not received sustained theoretical examination. While agreeing with Rose (2003: 214) that analysing the various modalities of the visual requires careful empirical investigation (and backing up that belief through the analysis

of Darfur's photojournalistic enactment below), this paper maintains that we still need much more work on the theoretical stakes assumed and invoked by various visual claims.

That said, being an early instalment of an on-going project, it is not possible to provide here a full, nuanced account of all the philosophical issues at stake. Instead, these issues are best indicated by seven sets of questions about vision, visuality and geopolitics that, by expanding the research questions guiding the overall project discussed above, establish the broad parameters of theoretical inquiry that will make subsequent empirical investigations possible.

The first set of questions involves the fundamental relationship between vision and knowledge. Can we say vision has been the dominant sense of the modern era, with ocular metaphors securing scientific knowledge? Darkness and light are the founding metaphors of Western philosophy, with knowing modelled on what is supposed to take place in the act of vision – a tradition summarised in Rorty's (1981) analysis of the "mirror of nature". Does this alter our understanding of photography as a particular visual technology? How does this relate to the idea of 'Africa' as the 'dark continent'?

Secondly, if abstraction and interpretation are inevitable and unavoidable for all forms of knowledge, does acknowledging the inevitability of the aesthetic foreground the importance of visuality (Bleiker, 2001)? What are the political implications of acknowledging the aesthetic?

Thirdly, should we regard vision and visuality as opposed as nature/culture? Or is vision physiological as well as social and historical, while visuality involves the body and the psyche as well as cultural and social practices? Does this mean that the issue of visual culture is "how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseeing therein" (Foster, 1988: ix)?

Fourthly, should late modernity be viewed as a uniquely visual era, and is the importance of the visual a novel phenomenon? It might be the case that the production and circulation of images has intensified in the late modern era, but has this intensification led to the emergence of a new class of things or a novel historical development?

Fifthly, how can the study of visual culture develop an understanding of the similarities and differences amongst the categories of 'image', 'picture' and other 'visual artefacts' (Elkins, 1999)? Does this mean art history, with categories like 'informational images' versus 'art', is too limited to understand visual culture? Should we regard still and moving images as particular forms of media that require distinctive analyses? Does the still image have particular functions like memory?

Sixthly, is it the case that all media are mixed media? Does this mean that visual media are not a distinct class of things, nor that there is a purely visual medium? If so, does the mixture of media render the search for meaning in the image itself a fallacy? How then should we interpret documentary photography and photojournalism?

Lastly, can the visual be interpreted in terms of discourse or does it demand a unique mode of analysis? (cf. Jay, 1993; Mitchell, 1994). What would it mean for discourse to be understood in terms of the 'performative' (enacting what it names through materialization over time) rather than 'construction' (wilful representations of the external)? How does this change our understanding of geopolitics?

While these questions need to remain open and the subject of debate, in order to proceed to an analysis of a specific moment of geopolitics and visuality – photojournalism's production of Darfur in contemporary coverage – we need to draw some conclusions. Following Deborah Poole's important anthropological study of the Andean image world – the multiplicity of images that in the 19th and 20th centuries circulated between the America's and Europe creating a sense of place with a particular kind of people – the theoretical debates above establish the

basis for investigating photography as a technology of visualization that both draws on and establishes a “visual economy” (Poole, 1997).

Poole argues that the idea of a *visual economy* is superior to the notion of *visual culture*. For Poole (1997: 8) the idea of economy calls attention to the way “visual images [are] part of a comprehensive organization of people, ideas and objects.” This organization involves three levels: the organization of production comprising the individuals and the technologies that produce images; the circulation of goods, meaning the transmission and publication of images and image-objects; and the cultural resources and social systems through which images are interpreted and valued (Poole, 1997: 9–10). In addition to the organizational dimensions which bring a picture into being and help produce its meaning, the idea of a visual economy makes clear that the visual field is both made possible by and productive of relations of power, and that these power relations bear at least some relationship to wider social and political structures which are themselves associated with transnational relations of exchange in which images are commodities. The consequence of this is that people in disparate places can be part of the same economy when they may not be part of the same culture. Furthermore, it might be the case that the workings of the visual economy produce cultural differences which make any notion of a culturally common visual world unsustainable.

Invoking the idea of visual economy means that images cannot be isolated as discrete objects but have to be understood as imbricated in networks of materials, technologies, institutions, markets, social spaces, affects, cultural histories and political contexts.¹ This resolution of some of the philosophical questions above means that a study of this kind has to be concerned with an examination of what images do in circulation rather than just an interpretation of their iconography. Therefore, in conjunction with the individual biographies, habits and skills of selected photographers, the idea of a “visual economy” signals the practices through which a place and its people is enacted and our response made possible. This leads to three tentative conclusions on geopolitics and visuality.

First, visual economy must go beyond the *social construction of the visual field* to a primary concern with *the visual performance of the social field* (cf. Mitchell, 2002: 171). In contrast to studies concerned with representations of social phenomena, this shift to the performative will detail how such phenomena are made possible through visualization. This approach understands geopolitics as a discursive practice with material effects in much the same manner as photography generally.

Second, the visual performance of the social field is enabled by and produces geopolitical discourses in which the relationship between *site* and *sight* is central. (cf. Schwartz & Ryan, 2003). This calls attention to the role of visuality in the production of geographical imaginations, and how the relations of sight/site establish the conditions of possibility for a political response.

Third, these geopolitical discourses structure our encounters with other human beings in space and time; the visual culture of geopolitics therefore “finds its primal scene in the face of the Other,” making it a significant location for questions of ethics, politics and responsibility (Mitchell, 2002: 175). This raises the all important question of global community, with images being understood as establishing either distanced or proximate relations with others. Can photography escape these constraints and offer an ethical relationship with the Other? Will more or better pictures help in the struggle for attention and action in places like Darfur?

¹ Pursuing this line of inquiry intersects with new theoretical work on materiality (Bennett, 2004), for which the production, circulation and consumption of photographs is an important location (Edwards & Hart, 2004).

A comprehensive analysis of the pictures that represented the conflict in Darfur would require — in line with the idea of a visual economy — an exegesis of their production, the images themselves and their audiencing across a variety of media outlets (Rose, 2001). In providing an example for the argument made so far, this paper offers a self-consciously and self-reflexively partial account.

The focus of the analysis is on the images in their site of publication. While some questions of production are thereby touched on, the much larger questioning of audiencing will not be addressed. Of all the media outlets that could have been examined for their photojournalism of Darfur, I have chosen to look at the UK daily newspaper *The Guardian* and its sister publication (on Sundays) *The Observer*. This choice is not wholly random. Both newspapers have a publicly disclosed empathy for African issues, having been prominent in promoting the Make Poverty History campaign that culminated in the Live 8 concerts in 2005 (Guardian Unlimited, 2006). This means that they are among the most likely carriers of images that could depart from stereotypical and problematic pictures of Africa.

Nonetheless, the sample considered constitutes a snapshot by relatively concerned publishers of how Darfur appeared visually to British newspaper readers. That sample was compiled using a Lexis-Nexis search for all articles on Darfur in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* from 2003 to 2005. Once identified, articles were then searched on microfilm to see which had accompanying photographs. A simple content analysis of those photographs was done, concentrating on the subjects of the images. This is followed by a brief consideration of photojournalism in other outlets (such as *Time* magazine, the work of individual photojournalists, and the galleries of some non-government organizations involved in Sudan) to see how particular the news photographs in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* are. The results of this analysis will be discussed after the political context of the conflict in Darfur is articulated.

Darfur — the political context of conflict

By the middle of 2005, some 3.2 million people — 50% of Darfur's population — required humanitarian assistance to sustain their livelihood. With 12,500 aid workers from 81 NGOS and 13 UN agencies in the region, the international community had put in place a substantial support operation (World Health Organization, 2005: 9). Their task was to cope with the consequences of a 2-year old conflict that had displaced more than 2 million civilians and killed at least 200,000 and perhaps 300,000 people (International Crisis Group, 2005: 3; Prunier, 2005:148–152).

The fighting that produced this suffering is commonly understood to have begun in early 2003 when two rebel groups — the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) — began attacking Sudanese government and military installations in the province. As Julie Flint and Alex de Waal (2005: 95) have written, Darfur's rebels are

“an awkward coalition... united by deep resentment at the marginalization of Darfur...Theirs is not an insurgency born of revolutionary ideals, but rather a last-ditch response to the escalating violence of the *Janjiwiid* and its patrons in Khartoum.”²

² Except where cited directly in quotes, *Janjiwiid* (which the US has sometimes called *Jingaweit*) will be rendered in the form common to both newspaper coverage and UN documents as *Janjaweed*.

This means that an appreciation of the conflict requires some understanding of the context that preceded the overt fighting of 2003.

In a country whose axis of identity is most often said to run North/South, the residents of Darfur personify a complex of identity that cannot be reduced to the polarity of “Northerners” and “Southerners.” Darfur is variously thought to be made up of between 40 and 150 “ethnic groups” or “tribes,” with groups ranging in size from a few thousand to a million or more (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 8; Prunier, 2005: 167n). Often nomadic, these groups have many points of encounter but only a loose linkage between territory and identity. This mobility has meant that

“identities in Darfur have always been complex, subtle and fluid, with the possibility of individuals or groups changing identity in response to political and economic circumstance” (Baldo, Morton, Marchal, & de Waal, 2005).

However, little if any of this ethnographic hybridity has had an impact on understandings of the conflict. As Prunier (2005: 76) argues, the multiplicity of group identities “could be the objects of anthropological literature but they were extremely unlikely ever to be considered the subject of political analysis.” This is not to say that political analysis is devoid of an anthropology. Rather it is to note that — as in the case of other conflicts, such as the war in Bosnia (see Campbell, 1999) — the political anthropology of contemporary analysis is one which postulates a fixed identity politics rather than a fluid politics of identity. Indeed, as Baldo et al. (2005) have concluded, “there are worrying signs that a discourse over ‘autochthony’ (belonging) is emerging in Darfur and elsewhere.”

This stabilization of Darfur’s multiple identities is most obvious in the way the conflict is rendered as one of “Arabs” versus “Africans.” It is common to both media and diplomatic representations. Newspapers write of an “age-old ethnic conflict” (Guardian Unlimited, 2004; Sengupta, 17 January 2004) and political leaders — as disparate as Sudan’s Vice President and the United States Deputy Secretary of State — speak of a “tribal war” which is “very common in Africa” (International Crisis Group, 17 March 2006: 3–4). If orientalism as a discursive formation can mutate into regionally specific articulations (akin to the notion of “Balkanism” described by Todorova, 1997) then what this autochthonous discourse demonstrates is the power of something akin to “Africanism” in which the continent is homogenised, tribalised and rendered completely ‘other’ to its US and European counterparts.³

The problem is that this dichotomous understanding overlooks the fact that “Darfur’s Arabs are black, indigenous, African and Muslim — just like Darfur’s non-Arabs” (de Waal, 25 July 2004). This is not to suggest that the idea of “Arabs” versus “Africans” is of no significance with regard to Darfur. To the contrary, it remains a vital focal point of any analysis, but it needs to be understood as a contemporary political fracture rather than an ancient ethnic fault line. It also needs to be understood as a consequence of the violence rather than a cause of the conflict.

“Arabism” in Darfur emerged from the politics of the Sahara in the early 1980s, spurred on by Libya’s drive for regional geopolitical authority. In addition to arming various groups in Chad and Sudan with weapons, this initiative introduced a discourse of Arab supremacy. This led to the establishment of an organization called *Tajamu al Arabi*, usually translated as

³ This process draws on long established interpretive traditions; see Pieterse (1992). It is apparent in the photographic iconography of African disaster, especially the recurrent stereotypes of famine imagery. See Campbell (2003) and Campbell, Clark, and Manzo (2005) for this background.

“Arab Gathering”. Arab Gathering emerged publicly in October 1987 when it sent an open letter to the then Sudanese prime minister calling for the “Arab race” to be given greater regional authority at the expense of the Fur and Zaghawa tribes, who they disparagingly termed *zurga*, a term connoting those non-Arab indigenous people who are sub-human, uncivilised, or pagan and thus enslaveable (Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre, 2005; Flint & de Waal, 2005: 38, 49–53). Traces of this drive for supremacy were found in clashes with the Zaghawa in the late 1980s when “attackers who had burned villages wrote *Tahrir Watan al Arabi* (The Liberated Arab Nation) in the ashes.” Such incidents led Zaghawa leaders to compose a 1991 memorandum to the Sudanese president charging the government with creating “an apartheid region” by condoning “crimes against humanity” (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 74).

Unconcerned by such protests, the Khartoum government embarked on constitutional reform in 1994 that redrew Darfur’s administrative boundaries, divided the Fur (making them minorities in the new regions) and gave the bulk of new political posts to those committed to Arab supremacy. When popular resistance to these measures resulted in a conflict that saw hundreds killed and 100,000 flee to Chad in 1996–1998, an official Sudanese government militia, the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), was tasked with keeping order. Non-Arabs were barred from the PDF, and its violence earned it the moniker “Janjaweed” (bandits) from the local Masalit tribes (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 57–61).

While the political cleavages have thus been present for some time in Darfur, the scale of the conflict post-2003 has been greater than before because of the hardening of the identity categories and the militarization of the Arab supremacist position. Indeed, Arab supremacy and the militias come together in the figure of Musa Hilal, recognised as both the most prominent Janjaweed leader and the head of the Arab Gathering, who operates with the backing of the Khartoum government (Human Rights Watch, 19 July 2004, 2005). Commanding a force of 20,000 fighters, Hilal is clear in his aims. An August 2004 message from his headquarters to the commander of ‘the western military area’ stated: “‘You are informed that directives have been issued...to change the demography of Darfur and empty it of African tribes’ through burning, looting and killing of ‘intellectuals and youths who may join the rebels in fighting’” (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 106).

The functions and operation of Hilal’s militia are not unique to contemporary Sudan. As Prunier argues, ever since the current regime came to power in Khartoum in 1989, Sudan has been in a state of permanent war with counter-insurgency against various peoples as permanent policy. In campaigns against the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) in the South, Bar-le-Ghazal in 1986–1988, the Nuba mountains in 1992–1995 and the Upper Nile in 1998–2003, the government of Sudan (GoS) has used militias supported by military intelligence and aerial bombardment in a strategy that can be called “counter-insurgency on the cheap” (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 24–25). From this, Prunier concludes that

“the whole of GoS policy and political philosophy since it came to power in 1989 has kept verging on genocide in its general treatment of the national question in Sudan” (Prunier, 2005: 105. Emphasis in original).

The problem for those seeking a response to the effects of this permanent war on civilians is that despite the visibility of Janjaweed leaders like Musa Hilal, the Janjaweed remain poorly defined, making calls for the disarmament difficult to implement. The International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (ICID) – established by the UN Security Council – declared that the Janjaweed were

“Arab militia acting, under the authority, with the support, complicity or tolerance of the Sudanese State authorities, and who benefit from impunity for their actions” (ICID, 2005: 31–32).

However, the Janjaweed did not have a single command structure but, rather, comprised three categories of actor.

“First, [there are] the militias which are loosely affiliated with the state, supported by weapons supplies etc. Second, militias which are paramilitary and operate in parallel with official forces, often commanded by army officers. Third, those militias which are part of the PDF and Border Intelligence” (ICID, 2005: 33).

Added to this is the fact that the Sudanese government has, since the conflict in Darfur has attracted more international attention, hidden considerable numbers, perhaps one-half of the militias, in the formal security services (the PDF, the Border Intelligence Units and the Central Reserve Police or riot police) (International Crisis Group, 20 June 2006: 5).

Although the Janjaweed, in its various guises, is deemed to be “Arab”, the ICID was keen to note that the situation on the ground was more complex than that label suggested:

“The fact that the Janjaweed are described as Arab militias does not imply that all Arabs are fighting on the side of the Janjaweed. In fact, the Commission found that many Arabs in Darfur are opposed to the Janjaweed, and some Arabs are fighting with the rebels, such as certain Arab commanders and their men from the Misseriya and Rizeigat tribes. At the same time, many non-Arabs are supporting the Government and serving in its army” (ICID, 2005: 32).

Despite these complexities, and in response to the rise and impact of the political discourse of Arab supremacy, non-Arabs in Darfur have mobilised around an “African” identity. From the late 1990s onwards, those the Arab supremacists designated as “Zurga” have grasped and inverted the term, inflecting it with a series of positive meanings. As a mark of difference and a sign of solidarity, it functions as a declaration of aboriginality and land ownership in the face of dispossession and displacement (Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre, 2005; de Waal, 2004: 12). It also serves to align the cause of those subject to Arab supremacy with the main southern rebel movement (the SPLA) that is organised in identity terms familiar to the international community (the ‘African south’ versus the ‘Arab north’), thereby giving the Darfur resistance potential influence with the international community (Baldo et al., 2005). This production of the lines of difference along the ‘Arab’/‘African’ axis, and its adoption by various groups that do not fit naturally into this dualism, demonstrates how fixed and exclusive renderings of identity are the product, rather than the *a priori* condition, of large-scale violence. As de Waal (2004: 12) concludes,

“identity markers that had little salience in the past are extremely powerful today, and the overwhelming reason for this is the appalling violence inflicted on people.”

The constitutive role of violence in the production of new identities can be seen in the July 2001 formation of a Fur and Zaghawa alliance that “swore a solemn oath on the Quran to work together to foil Arab supremacist policies in Darfur” (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 76). Containing the future military leaders of Darfur’s rebellion, this alliance then reached out to other non-Arabs, including the Masalit, to construct a united front. Unlike their southern counterparts in the SPLA, few of Darfur’s emerging rebels, said to comprise a group called the “Darfur

Liberation Front” (DLF), had the military experience necessary to resist the Janjaweed attacks. Organising military training was, therefore, the first priority of the new resistance. Once such training was completed in early 2002, the rebel groups began a series of attacks on government garrisons which continued throughout the year with considerable success.

While this violence was a concern for the government in Khartoum, it went largely unnoticed outside Sudan. It was not until the putative DLF developed and announced a political strategy – a struggle on behalf of all the marginalised people in Sudan – that involved renaming itself the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement did it start to register internationally (Flint & de Waal, 2005: 82). Even then, knowledge of the violence in Darfur was limited to Sudan specialists.

Recognition of the dynamics of violence in Darfur changed once displaced people began fleeing in large numbers to Chad. As the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur concluded, attacks by government forces and government-backed militias “deliberately and indiscriminately directed against civilians” with the impact of the attacks “manifestly disproportionate to any threat posed by the rebels” (ICID, 2005: 3). Villages have been subject to aerial bombardment, systematic looting and organised burning; religious sites have been desecrated; civilians have been raped, massacred and summarily executed; and intellectuals and notables have been arbitrarily imprisoned and tortured. The consequence is that in the areas subject to attack “everything that can sustain and succour life” has been destroyed, the population displaced and the countryside emptied (Human Rights Watch, May 2004) (Fig. 1).⁴

Despite an emerging awareness of the conflict in Darfur – prompted by reports from advocacy organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch in the second half of 2003 – media coverage and popular awareness of the situation was practically non-existent. This led Médecins sans Frontières to offer the paradoxical but nonetheless insightful observation that Darfur was a “forgotten crisis” even though it had not yet emerged as an event which could be remembered (Prunier, 2005: 131). As the bar chart of *Guardian/Observer* coverage demonstrates, neither paper covered Darfur prior to December 2003, and coverage was then sporadic until April/May 2004 (Fig. 2).

In part the reason for the international media’s inattention to Darfur in late 2003 and early 2004 was that the ‘Sudan story’ they were following concerned the Naivasha peace negotiations between the Khartoum government and the SPLA in the south. With limited resources to assign to Africa, and a not uncommon editorial sense that readers/viewers could handle only one major international story at a time (let alone more than one from the same marginalised region), the complexities of violence in Darfur remained undisclosed (Thompson, 2004). And with little coverage revealing itself to other elements of the media, what one human rights activist calls “a curious Catch-22” was operative: “When it comes to mass killings of civilians...If editors do not see the story on TV, they do not believe its news; if programme makers do not read it in the newspapers, they do not believe its news. And if politicians and officials don’t see it or read it except in reports thudding on to their desks from human rights and humanitarian NGOs, then that doesn’t quite count, either” (Crenshaw, 21 August 2004).

⁴ Satellite imagery is a particular kind of visibility central to geopolitics which, although not explored here, deserves more investigation (see Fair & Parks, 2001: 42–46). See the satellite imagery of Darfur at the US AID web site http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/sudan/satelliteimages.html (Accessed 26.09.06).

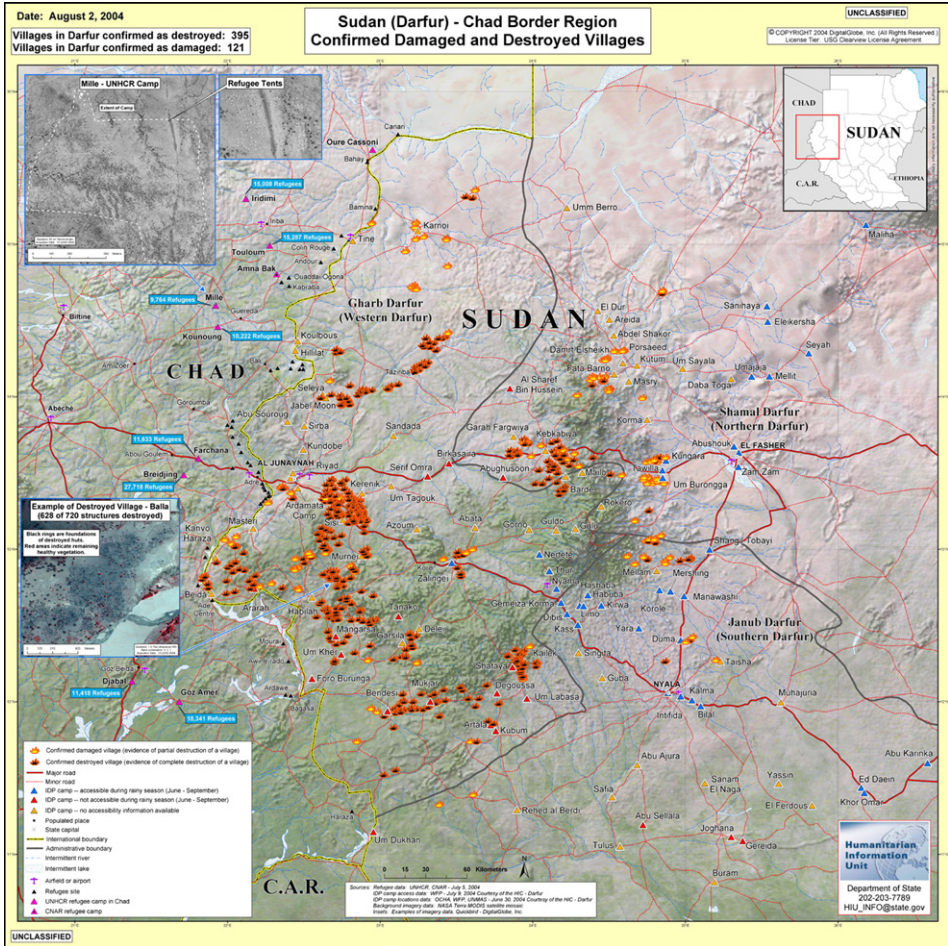


Fig. 1. Sudan (Darfur) – Confirmed Damaged and Destroyed Villages, 2 August 2004. DigitalGlobe, Inc. and Department of State via USAID.

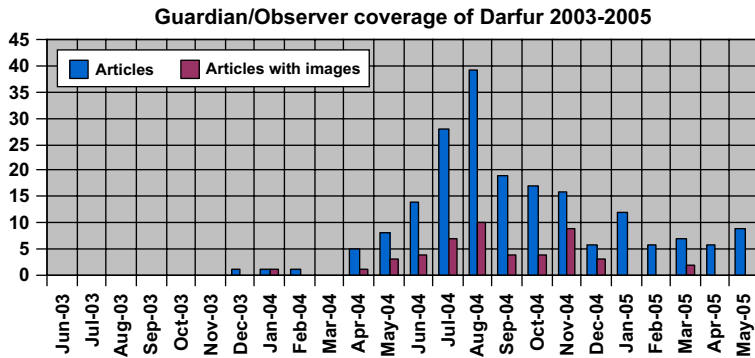


Fig. 2. Guardian/Observer coverage of Darfur 2003–2005.

All that changed, however, when the United Nation's Human Rights Coordinator for Sudan, Mukesh Kapila, declared in a March 2004 BBC interview that Darfur was "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" which differed from the genocide in Rwanda only in terms of the numbers currently affected. At the time there was significant media attention on the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda, and Kapila deliberately looked for a way to use that concern for the remembrance of the past to overcome the forgetfulness of the present (Jones, 19 January 2005).

Kapila's statement provided the international claim around which concern could gravitate. It also encapsulated the two modes of representation upon which subsequent interpretations of the violence in Darfur would draw — *humanitarianism* and *genocide*. Humanitarianism is in many respects the default option for the international community's understanding of African crises, which are often taken to be

"distant, esoteric, extremely violent, rooted in complex ethnic and historical factors which few understood, and devoid of any identifiable practical interest for the rich countries" (Prunier, 2005: 124).

It is also often the default option for the international media. Mass refugee movements provide the most visible traces of conflict, refugee camps — unlike the conflict zones themselves — are readily accessible with the assistance of humanitarian organizations, and the subsequent availability of affective images of innocent victims reproduces an easily understandable interpretation of the conflict for those watching, occasionally, from afar. Together this dynamic makes a situation like Darfur appear insoluble at source but with symptoms that can be addressed by humanitarian workers, in ways that do not have to involve the deployment of national political or military resources.

It was the *humanitarian* strand that was most evident in the *Guardian/Observer* news photographs. In the 2-year period reviewed there were 48 photographs — approximately one picture for every four articles — of or relating to Darfur. Starting with the first pictures in January 2004 (Fig. 3), more than two thirds of those photographs (33) were of refugees individually or collectively, and all but one of those refugee images showed women and children (see Fig. 4 for an example). Of the remainder, six photographs were of soldiers, four were of political leaders, one was of a dead combatant/victim (Fig. 5), one was of the landscape of war (the empty, destroyed villages) and three were of other subjects. Together, this meant that 43 of the 48 pictures invoked what Shapiro (1988: 129) has called the personal code — the foregrounding of individuals, often in photographic close-ups, to represent the situation.

With their overwhelming emphasis on women and children as refugees the Darfur photographs of 2004 showed a remarkable continuity with earlier crises in Africa, even if the nature of the crisis being portrayed was radically different (cf. Fair & Parks, 2001; Wright, 2002). Content analyses of newspaper photos during the Ethiopian famine of 1984 (which gave rise to the Live Aid phenomena) found that mothers and children featured more than any other subject. As one study noted:

"All these pictures overwhelmingly showed people as needing our pity — as passive victims. This was through a de-contextualised concentration on mid- and close-up shots emphasising body language and facial expressions. The photos seemed mainly to be taken from a high angle with no eye-contact, thus reinforcing the viewer's sense of power compared with their apathy and hopelessness. The 'Madonna and Child' image was particularly emotively used, echoing the biblical imagery. Women were at the same time patronised and exalted" (van der Gaag & Nash, 1987: 41).

International news

Two sands flee war in Sudan

Refugees seek shelter in desert across border with Chad as bombing raids and militias target separatist rebels

Jonathan Steele

Up to 10,000 refugees were trying to find shelter in the open desert just inside the border with Chad yesterday after Sudanese government aircraft bombed several targets in a fierce flare-up of an unexpected new war in Sudan's vast western province of Darfur.

UN officials and other aid workers have warned of a huge humanitarian emergency with as many as 600,000 people made homeless by fighting inside the territory. Unlike the refugees who escaped into Chad, they remain out of reach of international help.

Refugees and aid workers report frequent bombing raids by Sudanese government planes round the town of Tine which straddles the border, as well as mass killings and hut burnings by armed pro-government horsemen in other parts of Darfur.

Guthi al-Mahdi, the political adviser to Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, confirmed that government planes had bombed four targets this week but insisted they were camps run by rebels fighting for autonomy for the region. "The rebels had suffered 'a lot of losses', he told the Associated Press.

The village of Habla was deserted, according to the UN refugee agency, after its entire population of 1,750 fled an air attack 10 days ago. An aircraft and helicopters had bombed it, they said, before armed men on horses and camels arrived and stole cattle.

The UNHCR has been racing to erect tented camps several miles inside Chad and urging refugees to move there. The armed raiders have often crossed short distances into Chad along the 460-mile border to continue harassing people who have only bushes as shelter against the wind and sand.

The sudden surge in fighting has come as Sudanese officials and negotiators from the Sudan People's Liberation Army are close to final agreement on a power-sharing deal to end a 20-year civil war between the north and the south.

They have agreed to share the country's oil wealth and to hold a referendum on the south's possible secession in six years' time. Their talks adjourned this week until February 17 because of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

The war in Darfur will not affect that deal, it appears to have been sparked by it.

Leaders of the two armed movements fighting for Darfur's autonomy, the Sudan Liberation Army and a smaller group called the Justice and Equality Movement, hope to exploit the government's willingness to make concessions in the south to get similar benefits for the marginalised western province. The Khartoum area and the nearby Nile region have always been excessively favoured, they claim.

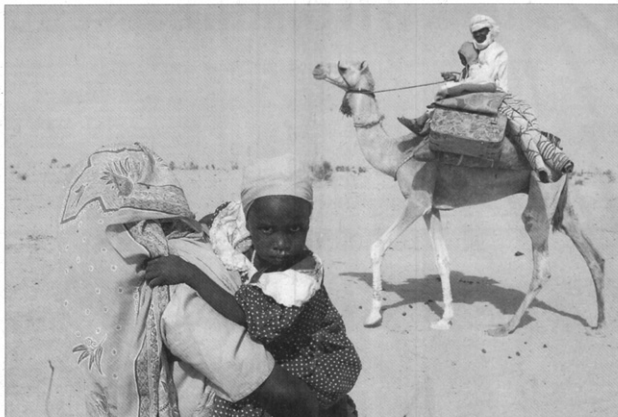
Clashes

Although clashes between nomads and settled pastoralists have gone on in Darfur for years, they were usually settled by tribal reconciliation conferences. Tensions became overtly political after the autonomists took up arms last February and captured Tine.

Up to 85,000 people fled into Chad over the next several months as the government and armed militias sought to quell the widening rebellion.

Kofi Annan, the UN secretary general, said last month he was "alarmed at the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation and reports of widespread abuses against civilians, including killings, rape, and the burning and looting of entire villages".

Researchers from Amnesty International, who interviewed refugees late last year, said: "The government has indiscriminately bombed towns and villages,



Refugees in Chad, above and below, after fleeing fighting between Khartoum-backed militias and the Sudanese Liberation Army. Main photograph: Karel Prinsloo/AFAP



suspected of harbouring or sympathising with members of the armed opposition, unlawfully killing many non-combatants."

Details of these killings are due to be published next week in an Amnesty report.

The conflict is different from the main north-south war between the largely Arab government and the Nuer, Dinka and other black African ethnic groups. Most people in Darfur are Sunni Muslims and some call themselves "black Arabs".

Desperation

But Amnesty reports that "the conflict is rapidly taking on a racial note". The organisation criticises the government for restricting free speech and assembly, which prevents civilians raising their grievances and leads to desperation and violence.

Melocino says Frontières, the international medical charity which has been working with refugees in Chad and has a small team in Nyaia in Darfur, says the Sudanese authorities have forcibly relocated around 10,000 people in camps around the town.

A spokesman for the organisation said: "Many of the people fled in panic when the process began on Wednesday. On Thursday the camps were closed by the authorities."

"The new camps are unsafe and ill-equipped and MSF believes the move is harmful for a population already suffering from hunger, trauma and destitution."

"Mortality rates among these people in the camps are already at the level of an emergency."

The Chad government brokered a ceasefire last year, but it broke down in December. Efforts are under way to renew it. Britain and other western governments are offering to send international monitors to observe it.

Fig. 3. *The Guardian* 30 January 2004. Main photograph: Karel Prinsloo/AFAP. Second photograph: no credit. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2004.

While the Darfur photos demonstrated significant eye-contact, they functioned similarly in so far as they decontextualised people and portrayed them as passive and pitiable. Despite the scale of the violence in Darfur, few photographs portrayed combatants or casualties, adding further evidence to the contention that the news media is in actuality reluctant to portray unvarnished horror (Campbell, 2004).

This situation also demonstrated how dimensions of the global visual economy associated with production help to determine content. On any given day the picture desk at *The Guardian* receives some 7,000 images from around the world, the bulk of them provided by large photo agencies (such as Associated Press and Reuters), and it was from this source that many of the paper's Darfur images came. News agency photographers do not stay on the ground for long periods of time but tend to provide images that are sufficiently generic so they can be used

22 WORLD

Refugees executed in desert of Sudan



Julie Flint reports from Darfur where state militias are killing women and children

IT WAS PAST midnight when the farmer finally reached his home village of Delel in the Wadi Salih region of central Darfur, having crawled for hours under cover of darkness. Covered in blood and with a bullet wound in the neck, he told her he had been the sole survivor among 72 unarmed African men who had been trucked away for summary execution by a joint force of government soldiers and Arab militiamen.

"They drove us in army trucks and cars to a valley two kilometres south of Delel," he told a neighbour. "They then lined us up, made us kneel down and bend our heads and shot us from behind. I was left for dead."

On that same day, 13 more another 60 men belonging to the Fur tribe were massacred by a similar government-militia force in the Magir area, east of Delel. Nine Fur chiefs who had been arrested a week earlier were shot dead in prisons in Magir and Garsa, near Delel. Worst of the deaths came from relatives who had collected their bodies for burial.

"People woke up that day, it was a Friday – to find the whole area surrounded by government soldiers and Janjaweed militia conducting joint

operations with the regular army in Darfur," said Abdul Aziz, a neighbour of the massacre. "Dozens of villages around Delel have been burned by the government and many people had fled to Wadi Salih. The government and Janjaweed came and asked men aged between 20 and 60 where they came from. If they were displaced, they took them to the police station."

South of Wadi Salih there is a hill and near there a valley. They killed 71 men there that evening. It happened in Magir just like it happened in Delel. They took them to the hills and killed them."

Darfur, the westernmost region on the border with Chad, is one of Sudan's most inaccessible areas, closed to all but a few relief agencies and almost always out of bounds to journalists.

But access has never been so difficult – nor so critical – as in the 15 months since the settled African tribes who form a majority in Darfur took up arms, under the banner of the Sudan Liberation Army, to protest at the region's marginalisation and the government's failure to protect African farmers from punitive raids by Arab nomads forced south by drought and desertification.

The government's swift and bloody crackdown – first against the SLA and then, in the face of unexpectedly strong opposition, against civilians from the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes – reflects the importance of the SLA rebellion in Sudan. For Darfur – unlike southern Sudan, is overwhelmingly Muslim – dramatic proof of the country's Islamist rulers and a possible example for other marginalised groups in the all-important Muslim north.

The reasons for the mass executions in Wadi Salih, one of the gateway to the SLA's

headquarters in the Jebel Marra mountains, can only be guessed at since there was no judicial process and the Janjaweed enjoy impunity in Darfur. An attack on government troops in the Magir area on 1 February suggests that the massacre there may have been collective punishment for an attack that the SLA says killed more than 100 soldiers. Taken as a whole, however, the 143 killings appear to acknowledge the fact that the backbone of the SLA's fighting force is composed not of 'thieves and robbers', as the government claims, but of farmers driven

off their land by a scorched-earth campaign that threatens to create an Arab Darfur. The village of Tullus west of Wadi Salih is one of many burnt and then occupied by Janjaweed Arabs. After attacking the village in February, soldiers and Janjaweed chased women and children into a valley and shot them in cold blood as they tried to hide behind rocks and trees.

"They said: 'You are dogs! We will drive you off this land'" said Salma Zakariyah Hassan, 19. "They told me: 'You are a rebel and the son of rebels'" said Hussein

Da'Alfalah, 12, who was shot three times. The child saw three friends, aged between seven and 11, fall beside him, but does not know whether they lived or died. That, he explains, is why he is crying: not because he has disfigured face, shattered elbow and swollen, infected leg.

In the absence of monitors, a \$40 million humanitarian cease-fire, agreed in the Chadian capital N'goundama on 11 April, is a ceasefire in name only. The UN estimates that more than a million Darfurians – a fifth of the region's population – are already displaced, many in camps in which the Janjaweed maraud with impunity. More than 100,000 have fled to Chad, where most survive by begging. UN human rights investigators have accused the Sudanese government and the Janjaweed of unleashing a reign of terror in Darfur, employing the tactics used in the war in the south – ethnic militias, scorched earth and refusal of humanitarian access.

The US Agency for International Development, USAID, warned recently that 300,000 war-affected Darfurians could die in the next year unless the Sudanese government breaks with past practices and grants full and immediate humanitarian access. Given the lack

of access to Darfur, the number of dead can only be guessed at. But 25 days' research in Darfur indicates that massacres of up to 80 civilians are not uncommon and are almost always the result of co-ordinated government-militia action.

Despite the enormity of human tragedy unfolding unseen in Darfur, the UN Commission on Human Rights failed to adopt a robust condemnation of the atrocities there on the last day of its sixtieth session on Friday. The role of the European Union, including the delegation from the UK, was very disappointing," says Jemera Rose, Sudan researcher of Human Rights Watch. "They voted for the watered-down resolution which did not condemn the crimes against humanity going on in Darfur. They also voted to adjourn before a vote was taken on a much tougher resolution. Honduras – a very small, thinly populated country in Central America – did much more for human rights in Sudan than the entire EU when it voted not to adjourn before the issue was given the serious attention it deserves."

Julie Flint is the author of a forthcoming Human Rights Watch report on Darfur.

25 April 2004 The Observer



Thousands of displaced people gather in Magir, Darfur, to hear news of peace negotiations between rebels and the Sudanese government.

Photograph by Abd Raouf/AP



'They told me: "You are a rebel and the son of rebels." Then they shot me three times'

Soldiers shot Hussein Da'Alfalah, 12. Julie Flint



Fig. 4. *The Observer* 25 April 2004. Main photograph: Abd Raouf/AP. Second photograph: Julie Flint. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2004.

by their media clients over some time. Given their quick visits to crisis regions, agency photographers also rely on established contacts to provide speedy access. With the conflict zones of Darfur largely inaccessible – and given the fact that the nature of the violence meant there was no 'front line' to visit in order to obtain war imagery – most photojournalists covering the region have relied on humanitarian relief organizations to provide access to refugee camps in Chad as proxies for the conflict itself. Together these factors make a reliance on pictures of women and children as representative of the conflict unsurprising.

The concentration of the means of production in the global visual economy results in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* having very few photographers on staff. Occasionally, though, the papers do commission individual photojournalists to cover specific international events. In 2004 *The Guardian* commissioned Panos Pictures photojournalist Sven Torfinn (who is based in Nairobi) to spend some weeks covering Darfur for them. Torfinn shot hundreds of images, 111 of which are posted on the Panos Pictures web site for potential customers.⁵ Although far from eschewing refugees as subjects, Torfinn's photographs cover a much wider array of people and places, reflecting his ability to enter parts of Darfur with the SLA. It is no coincidence, therefore, that those few pictures run by *The Guardian* which showed combatants and

⁵ These pictures can be viewed by going to the Panos Pictures web site (<http://www.panos.co.uk/>), and in the power search entering 'Darfur' and selecting Sven Torfinn from the photographers list.



guardian.co.uk/world

International

Kibbutz crisis How economic realities have replaced socialist ideals across Israel 10

Bodies left unburied in Darfur hillside tell story of executions by Sudanese army and Janjawed militia



One of the bodies in north-western Darfur in the aftermath of an attack on a nearby village in April. Photograph: Sven Torfinn

Corpse that points the finger of guilt

Be reasonable, Sudan urges UN

Jesseca Vinagar in Darfur — On a shallow slope between two hills of orange rock and sand, a man's body lies curled in a foetal position. His hands are thrown up as if to protect his face from the bullet that punched a hole in his temple. A few feet away on the bare slope, another man's body lies between two youths. His arms are stretched out to the two younger ones, as if he was embracing them at the moment of death. This was the scene of an execution in north-western Darfur. The killings took place in April, but the bodies have been left as evidence of what took place. Scenes like this are being repeated in Sudan now. To the south of here, refugees report fresh government and Janjawed attacks on villages in recent weeks, in defiance of the UN Security Council resolution calling on Sudan to disarm the Arab militia. Massacres of men and boys have been reported by refugees wherever villages have been attacked, but proof

of the brutality of the war in Darfur has rarely been witnessed by outsiders. The hillside where the 12 bodies lie faces east over a plain which once held villages of the Zaghawa tribe, a black African ethnic group the government accuses of forming the backbone of the rebellion. In April, the Sudanese army and Janjawed militia conducted a comprehensive campaign of ethnic cleansing in this region; the villages all around here have been burned and their inhabitants expelled. A dozen men and boys from the area were captured and brought to this spot. Their families did not discover what had happened until a month later, in May, when a shepherd spotted their remains. The victims' bodies have been partly mummified by the dry air of the semi-desert, but a gentle wind carries the stomach-churning stink of decomposing flesh. The man curled in a foetal position lies at the centre of the group. He still has curls of black hair on his scalp. There is a gaping hole at his ankle

where it appears to have been chewed by an animal. Running along either side of the slope are the dried-up channels of two mountain streams, and it is here that the rest of the bodies lie. There are five bodies in one channel, six in the other. Some of the corpses are tangled together, as men were liquidated against each other at the moment they were shot. A rebel soldier, Ahmed Hamed Ibrahim, 45, said that at the time the government was destroying villages in the area, he and his younger brother, Mohammed Yusuf Ibrahim, were civilians. The market

town in which they lived was attacked from the air and then on the ground by Sudanese soldiers in cars and Janjawed on horseback. "I ran, and many women and children ran with me," Mr Ibrahim said. "I came to the summit of a hill, and I saw far away they captured many people. I ran further away, and

will become clearer on Thursday, when the UN secretary general's special representative is due to report to the security council. Dennis McNamara, a special adviser to the UN emergency relief coordinator on displacement, said yesterday that attacks and rape of refugees by militia members were still going on. Yesterday, 100 members of the Nigerian army went to join 120 Rwandan soldiers forming an African Union force to protect ceasefire monitors in Darfur.

"I didn't know what had happened to my brother," Mr Ibrahim was taken to the scene and identified his 25-year-old brother from his Jajababa robe and his shoes. Questions remain about precisely who those men and boys were. Mr Ibrahim is now a rebel fighter, and the rebels have much to gain from exploiting the sympathy of the west, but it is hard to take the emotion he displays. "As he speaks of his brother, Mr Ibrahim lowers his dark glasses once or twice to rub away tears. When he finishes speaking, he breaks into a flood of tears, pulls off his white cotton pappas cap and crushes it against his face. He insists he joined the Sudan Liberation Army only after the attack on his village. Rebel officers say their base in the area was established after the onslaught. It is possible the men were executed because they were captured SLA fighters or sympathisers, but they are all dressed in civilian garb — long tunics or robes — rather than the camouflage combat gear

furnished by the rebels. They are mostly barefoot, rather than booted as the fighters are, though their shoes may have been stolen by their killers. And even if they were captured rebels, this is still a war crime. Mr Ibrahim had wanted to give his brother the proper funeral rites, but rebel commanders ordered him and other relatives not to do so. "I wanted to bury my brother, as Muslims do. But the SLA said to let him lie free, and let foreigners come and see these crimes." He admits feeling disquiet about this breach of custom; he is anxious that his brother's soul will not find rest. "To leave a Muslim's body unburied is forbidden by Islam, and local tradition says the unburied man's spirit will haunt his family's dream and drive them insane. If accounts of the refugees who have poured out of western Sudan are correct, there are many more photos to haunt Darfur's black tribes."

George Monbiot, page 13 guardian.co.uk/notes

Fig. 5. *The Guardian* 31 August 2004. Photograph: Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2004.

casualties came from Torfinn's portfolio (see Fig. 5 for an example). Nonetheless, the picture of Torfinn's which sold best was one of a distressed boy in the ruins of his family's hut, demonstrating that the image of the child victim remains a potent signifier of African conflict.⁶ This is buttressed by the editorial decisions at *The Guardian* which meant that news agency-produced pictures of refugees were more commonly used to accompany Darfur stories than others from the range of photographs produced by Torfinn.

In the global visual economy it is often the editorial decisions at the place of publication — rather than the choices or desires of individual photographers — which help determine what and how we see. Take, for example, a picture (Fig. 6) shot by another Panos photographer, Jeroen

⁶ See Panos Pictures image reference STO00825SUD. Sales information from interview with Adrian Evans, director of Panos Pictures, April 2005. On the power of child-centred imagery in photographs of the majority world, see Burman (1994).



Fig. 6. Refugees from Darfur pass through the Enderta, Chad. Jeroen Oerlemans/Panos Pictures, 2004.

Oerlemans, in April 2004 of refugees from Darfur as they pass through the Chadian village of Enderta, on their way to the UNHCR camp at Farchana. Although refugees are its subject, it offers a view that testifies to the need to flee their homes in large numbers and in a manner with well-known historical resonance. As such, this picture could support a story of ethnic cleansing or genocidal violence specific to Darfur. But when it was used on the front page of *The Guardian* on 5 June 2004 (demonstrating how, despite instantaneous digital transmission, photographs can be used long after they are taken; see Fig. 7) it was accompanied by a headline that cast it in a particular light. Although the image was specific to Darfur, and although the text of the accompanying story was about the scale of the violence in Darfur, the headline decontextualised both into an all-too-familiar reprise of African disaster. As Fergal Keane has lamented of the media's coverage of the continent,

“it can become easy to see a black body in almost abstract terms, as part of the huge smudge of eternally miserable blackness that has loomed in and out of the public mind throughout the decades: Biafra in the sixties; Uganda in the seventies; Ethiopia in the eighties; and...Rwanda in the nineties” [followed by Darfur in the noughties] (Quoted in Levi Strauss, 2003: 88).

Although photography plays a key role in this production, the example of the Oerlemans photograph demonstrates the key conceptual point that photography is not simply visual — all media are mixed and the meaning of the image is gravely affected by the text (the article, headlines, caption, other stories and advertisements) that surround its presentation to the public.

Might it be the case, though, that photojournalists willing and able to operate for longer periods in a hostile environment, and media outlets with weekly rather than daily deadlines, produce qualitatively different images of conflicts? Examining the work of some prominent photojournalists will help answer the question whether more time to both produce and publish results in a different picture. James Nachtwey, a founding member of the photo agency *VII* and a contract photographer for *Time* magazine, is one of the best regarded photojournalists in contemporary photography. After an extended assignment in Darfur in 2004, his essay *Surviving Darfur* was published on the web to accompany the magazine's 4 October 2004 cover story “Tragedy of Sudan” (another example whereby the textual framing of the image, as ‘tragedy’

£1.10 (R C1 69)
Saturday
June 5 2004
Published in London
and Manchester
guardian.co.uk

The Guardian

Who are we?



Simon Armitage
Tim Herman

The British predicament. Exclusive extract from Timothy Garton Ash's major new book

Meet the next generation – 20 of the best new poets
Stephen Bierley on how he met his Paris match

Review

Weekend

Sport

90 days to stop another disaster in Africa

Hype fails to sway the patrons of Hay

Unfolding crisis in Sudan could see 300,000 deaths

Even MacAskill
Diplomatic editor

A huge operation to tackle the world's worst unfolding humanitarian crisis will swing into action today following a warning that up to 300,000 people in Sudan could die within months even if essential aid gets through.

The United Nations will launch a 90-day emergency programme after securing promises of funds from the US and other countries at a conference in Geneva.

The UN secretary described a developing catastrophe in the region of Darfur and said the relief effort was crucial "to avoid massive death and starvation".

International aid agencies blame the scale of the crisis on the neglect of the international community and the obstruction by the Sudanese government of aid efforts.

About 1.2 million people, who live in villages after being terrorised by government-armed Arab militia, are living in makeshift camps in Darfur and 100,000 in neighbouring Chad. The flow of refugees to the border with Chad was continuing yesterday.



Refugees heading for a UN relief camp; aid agencies blame the crisis on international neglect and Sudanese obstruction. Photograph: Gordon Omerman/Press

The UN plans to spend the money raised in Geneva over the next three months on:

- feeding 1 million people
- drilling boreholes and repairing water pumps and tanks for the camps
- providing basic health care to 90% of the displaced
- helping the displaced build temporary shelters
- distributing seeds and tools to 70,000 families
- deploying ceasefire monitors and human rights observers

The rainy season will hamper the humanitarian effort at the end of the year.

John Hooper in Rome and John Aglyon in Singapore

The Pope yesterday subjected George Bush to a very public, relentlessly critical assessment of the US administration's performance in Iraq, attacking the "deplorable" abuses of prisoners and calling for an international solution to the country's crisis.

During the president's visit to the Vatican, which the administration had hoped would help him win Catholic votes in November's presidential election, the Pope warned Mr Bush he would never succeed in the war on terrorism if he failed to ensure respect for basic human rights.

And he urged him to involve the United Nations in an operation to lift blocks on aid.

The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

She agreed with Mr Natio's assessment of the potential death toll. She said: "There are 300,000 people who are most likely to die in this period (the rainy season)".

Not one involved in the relief work cut out on aid agencies. One said it was not mad for the UN and aid agencies to exaggerate in order to secure donations.

He said the death toll will be much lower if aid gets through, noting that most of the displaced had already survived a year in the camps.

John Hooper in Rome and John Aglyon in Singapore

The Pope yesterday subjected George Bush to a very public, relentlessly critical assessment of the US administration's performance in Iraq, attacking the "deplorable" abuses of prisoners and calling for an international solution to the country's crisis.

During the president's visit to the Vatican, which the administration had hoped would help him win Catholic votes in November's presidential election, the Pope warned Mr Bush he would never succeed in the war on terrorism if he failed to ensure respect for basic human rights.

And he urged him to involve the United Nations in an operation to lift blocks on aid.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

The definitive 92-page guide to Euro 2004 will be free with the Guardian on Monday. Complete with team guides, a fill-in worksheet, all you need to know about Portugal, and Andy Gray on England's chances

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

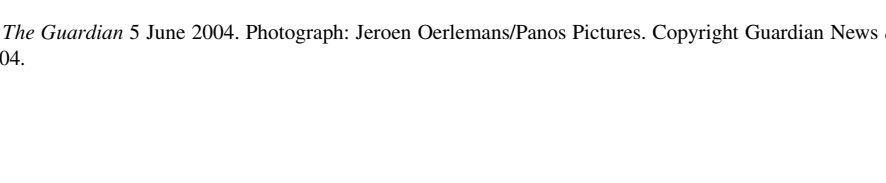
Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.

Customers to lift blocks on aid. The Sudanese government denies responsibility for the crisis in Darfur, but western governments claim it initially armed the Arab militia against a rebellion and created a monster.

An estimated 30,000 have been killed in the present host of fighting. The UN, Britain and others are calling on the Sudanese government to disarm the militia.

In an effort to tackle the militia and try to restore some security, the pan-continental African Union sent 10 monitors to Khartoum on Tuesday to oversee a shaky ceasefire agreed in April. They are due to deploy in Darfur this week, with a further 100 to follow.

Britain is to meet the £2m start-up costs of the observer force and expects the EU to provide a further £10m. The EU is also to complement the monitors with its military observers. Six human rights observers are also to be sent in. They will initially go without a back-up force to provide protection.



THE NEW PEUGEOT 407. PLAYTIME IS OVER.

407

FOR INFORMATION CALL 0845 200 0214 WWW.PEUGEOT.CO.UK/407 THE DRIVE OF YOUR LIFE

407 PEUGEOT

Fig. 7. The Guardian 5 June 2004. Photograph: Jeroen Oerlemans/Panos Pictures. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd 2004.

rather than, for example, ‘war crimes’, creates the meaning of the photograph).⁷ The 23 photographs that make up the essay are testament to Nachtwey’s visual skills, offering dramatic compositions in black and white. Divided into sections on shelter, medicine and food, they nonetheless focus predominantly on refugees as victims. While some of the pictures show Darfurians engaged actively in securing food and shelter, the majority continue to portray the refugees passively. Moreover, a number of the photographs – most notably those showing women and children in the ‘medicine’ portfolio – could easily refer to any recent conflict or humanitarian crisis in Africa.

Marcus Bleasdale is a prize-winning freelance British photojournalist who has also worked extensively in Darfur and had some of his work published by *Time* magazine. On his personal web site a portfolio of 17 photographs from Darfur appears under the title “Death in the Desert.” This selection opens with a picture from the village of Disa of a child in her mother’s arms, an image that UNICEF named as its Photo of the Year in 2004 and which helped earn Bleasdale the accolade of the POYi “Magazine Photographer of the Year” in 2005.⁸ In a BBC interview where Bleasdale recounted his experiences in Darfur he told the story of how he came to take that photograph in Disa, noting that

“when I saw it through the viewfinder it was...maybe it’s a cliché, but I think every photographer knows when they take an image that they feel is going to be powerful, and I certainly felt that when I was taking this one” (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2005).

Given the generic, stereotypical nature of this photograph, Bleasdale’s reflection suggests that photojournalists could have a culturally determined sense of an image’s power prior to their encounter with their subject.

Almost half of the photographs in Bleasdale’s 11-picture *Time* magazine web presentation portray refugees in familiar ways. However, the remaining pictures offer some more varied subjects, including an SLA fighter with satellite phones (indicating the organised and modern nature of the resistance). In other examples – such as the photograph of two Darfurians looking at a bomb dropped by a Sudanese government aircraft available on his personal web site (picture #5) – there is evidence that the body of photographic

⁷ See James Nachtwey, *Surviving Darfur* at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101041004/photoessay/>. The cover story “Tragedy of Sudan” can be seen at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101041004/>, with Nachtwey’s cover photo available at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20041004,00.html> (Accessed 21.09.06). Under the title “Genocide in Darfur” Nachtwey’s work won both the first and second place prizes (for Magazine Division/General News Reporting) in the 2005 Sixty-Second Annual Picture of the Year International Competition (POYi). The print publication of “Tragedy of Sudan” won an award of excellence for *Time* in the Editing Division/Magazine Multiple Page News Story (see <http://www.poyi.org/62/35/ae03.php>). Along with Marcus Bleasdale (see below) two other photojournalists – Bruno Stephens of *Newsweek* (http://www.poyi.org/62/24/stev_01.php) and Jihad Nga of the Corbis agency (http://www.poyi.org/62/25/nga_01.php) – were winners for their work in Darfur. In another prestigious global competition, Jan Grarup – staff photographer for the Danish newspaper *Politiken* – won the Visa d’Or prize for Daily Press at the annual 2005 Visa Pour L’Image exhibition in Perpignan (see <http://www.bjp-online.com/public/showPage.html?page=295927>). Grarup’s pictures were in *Politiken Søndag* 10 April 2005, and are published in his book *Shadowland*. Pictures from the book, along with a moving commentary by Grarup, can be seen and heard at <http://www.shadowland-book.com/>. (All sites Accessed 28.09.06).

⁸ Bleasdale’s Darfur portfolio is available at <http://www.marcusbleasdale.com/features/gallery.php?fid=13>. His *Time* magazine photo essay *Sudan’s Slow Motion Tragedy*, which was linked to the 5 July 2004 story “Nowhere to Hide,” is at <http://www.time.com/time/photoessays/sudan/Details>. Details of the UNICEF award are at http://www.unicef.de/foto/2004/engl/index_engl_2004.htm and the POYi award is at <http://www.poyi.org/62/winnerslist.html>. (All sites Accessed 28.09.06).

work Bleasdale produced while in Darfur is broader than the selections which are published in mainstream media outlets like *Time*. For example, when Bleasdale's photographs are used in a Human Rights Watch essay "Darfur in Flames" there is a greater emphasis on images that show direct traces of violence, such as destroyed villages, mass graves, ordnance and those who have died (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Indeed, when human rights groups — such as Physicians for Human Rights — use images there is a forensic quality to their visuals that emphasises their value as documentary evidence of violence. In contrast, those humanitarian groups whose purpose is to aid refugees affected by that violence employ imagery which functions — much like the news photographs reviewed above — to install empathy for those suffering as victims.⁹ As David Levi Strauss (2003: 74) has remarked, "the first question must always be: Who is using this photograph, and to what end?" Different functions produce different forms.

The documentary photography of the likes of Nachtwey and Bleasdale is exceptional in its visual skill and aesthetic quality, something recognised by the substantial number of professional awards each has received for their work in Darfur. That they were able to spend considerable time in the region and then find publication venues which could present their work serially rather than as a single picture undoubtedly contributed to the quality of their efforts. Nonetheless, with their mix of refugees and SLA fighters, none of these photojournalists — be they news agency or photo agency photographers, freelancers or staff photographers — offered images radically different in content from those that appeared in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*. As such, much of this photojournalism is allied with the humanitarian problematisation of Darfur as a crisis, something which has been made explicit in the case of James Nachtwey, who made a public service announcement for the World Food Programme's aid programme in Darfur (World Food Programme, 2004). Does such a deployment mean, therefore, that picturing the genocide that many claimed has been occurring in Darfur involved or required different photographs?

Genocide and the politics of identity

It was the claim that genocide could be occurring in Darfur that propelled much of the media coverage of the crisis in 2004. As discussed above, the March 2004 statement by the UN official Mukesh Kapila that Darfur was "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" also introduced the narrative of genocide by comparing the situation to Rwanda 10 years earlier. This interpretation was furthered when in May 2004 the Committee on Conscience of the United States Holocaust Historical Museum described Darfur as genocide (Committee on Conscience, 2004). On 22 July 2004, the US Congress passed a resolution declaring Darfur a genocide (Corey, 2004), and on 9 September 2004 then US Secretary of State Colin Powell testified to the US Senate that the Bush administration had concluded "that genocide has occurred and may still be occurring in Darfur" (Powell, 2004). Although Powell went on to minimise the impact of this declaration — stating that "no new action is dictated by this determination" — it signalled the power of an unusual political alliance to influence official US positions. Combining the Christian right (who viewed Sudan as a bastion of Islamic

⁹ Compare, for example, Physicians for Human Rights "The Crisis in Darfur 2005" at http://www.phrusa.org/research/sudan/gallery_darfur/ with CARE Canada's "Crisis in Sudan" at http://www.care.ca/images_of_care/sudan_chad/photo_e.shtm (Accessed 21.09.06).

fundamentalism which enslaved non-believers), the African-American civil rights lobby (who called for more attention to injustice in Africa) and liberal interventionists (who wanted the US to use its military for moral purposes), this formation was successful in putting Darfur on the American political agenda. The official declarations that Darfur was suffering genocide were the major achievement of this grouping.

The increasing international concern with Darfur meant it also became a matter for the UN Security Council. On 18 September 2004, Security Council resolution 1564 was passed, calling (among other things) for the establishment of a commission to determine whether or not “acts of genocide” had occurred in Darfur. When it reported in January 2005, the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur (ICID) concluded that genocide had not and was not occurring. The reasoning of the ICID is interesting for what it reveals about the politics of identity in both Darfur and the Genocide Convention, and for the challenge its conclusions pose to photojournalists who want to photograph a possible genocide.

The Genocide Convention requires the protected groups to be ethnic, national, racial or religious. In these terms, a ‘tribe’ – the unit of choice in the understanding of Darfur’s politics of identity – does not constitute a protected group. Moreover, the ICID (2005: 125–126) found that

“the various tribes that have been the object of attacks and killings (chiefly the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes) do not appear to make up ethnic groups distinct from the ethnic group to which persons or militias that attack them belong. They speak the same language (Arabic) and embrace the same religion (Muslim).”

As a result, neither a tribe generally, nor the particular tribes within Darfur, objectively constituted protected groups such that the violence to which they were subject could be legally understood as genocide (ICID, 2005: 129).

However, the ICID then noted that recent jurisprudence, developed largely in the international tribunals dealing with the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, has undergone some changes, most notably appreciating that collective identities are social constructs not social facts. The Commission declared that because this interpretation and expansion of the understanding of collective identity has not been challenged by States it could be safely viewed as “part and parcel of international customary law” (ICID, 2005: 127). This meant that although the tribal groups of Darfur were not objectively protected groups in terms of the Genocide convention one now had to inquire as to whether they met the new subjective standard – that is, did they perceive each other and themselves as constituting distinct groups. In answering this question, the Commission reasoned:

“The Arab-African divide has also been fanned by the growing insistence on such [a] divide in some circles and in the media. All this has contributed to the consolidation of the contrast and gradually created a marked polarisation in the perception and self-perception of the groups concerned. At least those most effected by the conditions explained above, including those directly affected by the conflict, have come to perceive themselves as either ‘African’ or ‘Arab’ ... *For these reasons it may be considered that the tribes who were victims of attacks and killings subjectively make up a protected group*” (ICID, 2005: 130. Emphasis added).

This conclusion, which superseded the objective conclusion that the tribes of Darfur were not protected groups, means that not only has international law made space for social constructivism, it has opened itself to an understanding of violence as productive of identity, and of discursive formations as materializing different realities. In essence, then, international law has

recognised the performative element at the heart of genocidal violence. It is the stigmatisation of a group as a distinct national, ethnic or racial unit by the perpetrators which wish to identify that group as a targeted population which makes that targeted population a protected group and the violence against them genocide (Verdirame, 2000: 593–594). Rather than their status as a group being an *a priori* fact prior to any violence, it is the production of them as a targeted group during the violence that makes them both a target and a protected group.

Despite the ICID's recognition of these significant changes in recent international law, and notwithstanding their acceptance that these changes in the definition of protected groups applied to Darfur, the commission nonetheless concluded that the violence in Darfur did not constitute genocide. They reached this view after reviewing the grounds of whether one could determine genocidal intent on the part of the GoS (citing such facts as lack of desire to kill all Internally Displaced Persons before they made their way to refugee camps etc). Although the Commission concluded that some of the crimes perpetrated by the GoS and the Janjaweed were objectively similar, the lack of uncertainty about intent meant they could not characterize Darfur as genocide. However, in making this determination, the ICID was careful to conclude that although genocide has been commonly (if incorrectly) viewed as the crime of all crimes, there was in fact no hierarchy of legal importance, and that the crimes against humanity and war crimes they had identified were capable of attracting an equal sentence as anything that might be called genocide (ICID, 2005: 129).

With regard to how the situation in Darfur has been photographed, this conclusion about what constitutes genocide has significant implications. The predominantly humanitarian visualization of Darfur involves the reification of fluid identities into fixed forms. From the complex hybridity of the political anthropology of Darfur discussed above, the pictures of refugees and rebels – in conjunction with their discursive framing as “Arabs” versus “Africans” – has cast the conflict as a tribal war in which the victims appear to the outside world as another set of decontextualised casualties in the long history of African conflict.

In contrast, the argument that the violence in Darfur constitutes genocide – organised, systematic and state-sponsored violence – appears to introduce the missing dimension of political context into an otherwise seemingly natural process of ‘ancient’ and ‘ethnic’ fighting. Within both media and political circles, however, the charge of genocide is made possible by the rendering of the conflict as “Arabs” versus “Africans.” The photographs that claim to represent genocide enact visually this reification of identity. Take, for example, the publicity poster the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum makes available to draw attention to the “genocide emergency” in Darfur. Using a photograph taken by its Committee on Conscience staff director Jerry Fowler (Fig. 8) it shows Darfurian refugees in Chad in a classically pitiful mode (even though Fowler states it was their dignity which most impressed him). From a presentation entitled “Sudan: Staring Genocide in the Face,” Fowler's pictures – like most if not all those made by photojournalists – offer us the objectified face of the victim rather than the face of the perpetrator as evidence of genocide (Fowler, 2004).

The fixing of identity that flows from these representations of the violence help to perpetuate the conflict because these external claims about Darfur being divided between “Africans” and “Arabs” are being fed back into the political dynamic of the conflict itself (de Waal 2004: 13–14). The consequence, therefore, of both the humanitarian problematization of Darfur and the (seemingly alternative) interpretation of genocide is a particular performance of the social field that brings Darfur into being (as the world's worst humanitarian crisis and the genocide of “Arabs” against “Africans”) and makes it amenable to particular policy responses.



Fig. 8. Touloum refugee camp, Chad. Jerry Fowler/USHMM, 2004.

However, as the discussion above of the changes in international law demonstrates, the claim of genocide no longer requires an assumption of objectively given and permanently fixed identities. Even though it requires other dimensions to be established before it can be proved, this at least means that a different political anthropology — one attuned to the complexity, fluidity and hybridity of Darfur's many groups — can be recognised and supported. The question, then, is, how might this different political anthropology be photographed? How can pictures avoid the reification of identity even as they show the violence against groups stigmatized as 'other'? There are no easy answers to this dilemma, but it is worth noting that when it came to selecting an image to represent genocide, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum had access to a series of photographs which come closer than any others available to documenting the violence as it occurs. Brian Steidle, a former marine who was one of three U.S. military observers to the African Union monitoring force in Darfur, has produced a series of photographs that show villages as they are burnt (Fig. 9), Sudanese helicopter gunships strafing villages, Janjaweed militia dividing the goods they



Fig. 9. Um Zeifa, Darfur, beginning to burn after the Janjaweed looted and attacked. Brian Steidle, 2004.

have looted from villages, as well as their human victims and the ordnance that has killed and injured them (Steidle, 2005). It is in these images that we see the face of the perpetrators, but we have to ask why such pictures are rarely seen.

Conclusion

Knowledge involves abstraction, interpretation and representation. Historically, western models of knowledge have privileged a particular understanding of vision as their governing model. Paradoxically, while the inevitability of representation means aestheticization is unavoidable, the naturalistic understanding of vision claims that objectivity is achieved by a correspondence between an image and its external referent such that the issue of aesthetics can be avoided. In many respects, the photograph is the most obvious cultural site of this paradox. The founding element of photographic representation is the indexicality of the picture whereby the image is connected to its object (Hughes & Noble, 2003: 5). Yet because the process through which that link is established involves various economies and technologies, and because the result only ever offers a trace of its subject after the fact, the photograph is a construction that obscures its own production.

This is even more so when we consider news photographs, which function as indexical illustrations for the stories they accompany (Levi Strauss, 2003: 16ff). Buttressed by an empiricist epistemology and the historically established sense that photojournalism is a privileged genre for witnessing atrocity, news photographs perpetuate their own self-understanding as objective citations. In this context, responses to them can all too often engage in the sort of iconoclastic critique, exposing them as dangerously false, that Mitchell warns us against and this study wants to avoid.

Accordingly, to observe that the photojournalistic visualization of Darfur has been overwhelmingly concerned with refugees, especially women and children, in passive and pitiable forms, regardless of whether the narrative being illustrated is one of humanitarianism or genocide is not to say that those pictures are wrong or the photographers and their publishers are not telling the truth. Those images are what Roland Barthes (1981: 87) calls “certificates of presence” which faithfully record the people who were before the lens on those given days. Given that the refugee camps were the most accessible sites for photojournalists, and given that the refugee camps are overwhelmingly populated by women and children, the proliferation of such images is hardly surprising.

The issue these images pose, then, is not one of accuracy or appropriateness. It is a question of what they do, how they function, and the impact of this operation. As such, this means we need to depart from an understanding of photographs as illustrations and carriers of information (which a focus on their content could suggest) to an appreciation of pictures as ciphers that prompt affective responses. Although they appear – in C. S. Peirce’s famous terms – as *icons* and *indicies*, they are best appreciated as *symbols*. Indeed, they are metaphoric symbols. As Hayden White (1978: 91) suggests, a metaphor

“functions as a symbol, rather than as a sign: which is to say that it does not give us either a *description* or an *icon* of the thing it represents, but *tells us* what images to look for in our culturally encoded experience in order to determine how we *should feel* about the thing represented.”

It is for this reason that when we are dealing with photographs we are concerned with the visual performance of the social field, whereby pictures bring the objects they purport to simply

reflect into being. We are not concerned with the (in)accurate representation of already existing objects, but with the way in which sites (and people in those sites) are enacted through sight. The plethora of refugee photographs does not just tell us that there are millions displaced. They tell us how we should feel about Darfur as a place where the innocent are displaced and appear before us in ways that recall earlier conflicts. And although many of the individuals who are producing and publishing such images are hoping that we feel moved and responsible and driven to act, the affective responses engendered by these symbolic statements of conflict can — because of their familiar forms — just as easily lead to inattention and indifference. As such, the visual enactment of Darfur does not just mirror the geopolitical issues that are its subject. Rather, this visual enactment is itself geopolitical — that is, it both manifests and enables power relations through which spatial distances between self/other, civilized/barbaric, North/South, developed/underdeveloped are produced and maintained. Can more or better pictures produce the sort of political response to situations like Darfur that Jan Pronk — whose call this paper opened with — desires? More pictures will not, in and of themselves, provide the answer, especially if they follow the same aesthetic forms as those considered here. Better pictures? Of course, but what will constitute better with regard to pictures? Changing the content of the photograph, though sometimes valuable, is also not an answer in and of itself. In the end, given the inherently mixed nature of media, this challenge is not for documentary photography and journalism alone. But what photojournalists can begin to develop are visual strategies that do not reify identity and replicate neo-colonial relations of power.

Acknowledgements

This paper arises from the *Political Geography* plenary lecture at the Royal Geographical Society — Institute of British Geographers annual conference, London, August 31, 2006, the first part of which was based on a presentation to Durham Geography's Social/Spatial Theory workshop on 'Vision and Visuality', February 8, 2006. I am grateful to the editors and publishers of *Political Geography* for the opportunity to present and publish this work, and to Caitlin Patrick for research assistance. I am especially grateful to the audiences in London and Durham, and to Kate Manzo's subsequent reading, for perceptive questioning that pushed the argument and prompted many of the revisions included here.

References

- Baldo, S., Morton, J., Marchal, R., & de Waal, A. (2005). Darfur in 2004: the many faces of conflict. Joint memorandum, International Development Select Committee, House of Commons, 11 January 2005.
- Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography* (Richard Howard, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bennett, J. (2004). The force of things: steps towards an ecology of matter. *Political Theory*, 32, 347–372.
- Bleiker, R. (2001). The aesthetic turn in international political theory. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 30, 509–533.
- British Broadcasting Corporation. (2005). Picture power: misery in Darfur. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4517289.stm>. Accessed 21.09.06.
- Burman, E. (1994). Innocents abroad: western fantasies of childhood and the iconography of emergencies. *Disasters*, 18, 238–253.
- Campbell, D. (1999). Apartheid cartography: the political anthropology and spatial effects of international diplomacy in Bosnia. *Political Geography*, 18, 395–435.
- Campbell, D. (2003). Salgado and the Sahel: documentary photography and the imaging of famine. In F. Debrix, & C. Weber (Eds.), *Rituals of mediation: International politics and social meaning* (pp. 69–96). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Campbell, D. (2004). Horrific blindness: images of death in contemporary media. *Journal of Cultural Research*, 8, 55–74.
- Campbell, D., Clark, D. J., & Manzo, K. (Eds.). (2005). *Imaging famine*. <http://www.imaging-famine.org/>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Campbell, D., & Shapiro, M. J. (Eds.). (2007). Securitization, militarization and visual culture in the worlds of post-9/11. Special issue, *Security Dialogue*, 38(2), in press.
- Committee on Conscience. (2004). Sudan: Darfur overview. <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/alert/darfur/>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Corey, C. W. (23 July 2004). U.S. Congress terms situation in Darfur “genocide”. U.S. Department of State. <http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2004/Jul/26-233176.html>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Crenshaw, S. (21 August 2004). Genocide, what genocide? Human rights watch. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/08/21/sudan9309.htm>. Accessed 17.08.06.
- Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre. (2005). Memorandum. International Development Select Committee, House of Commons, 11 January 2005.
- Edwards, E., & Hart, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Photographs, objects, histories: On the materiality of images*. London: Routledge.
- Elkins, J. (1999). *The domain of images*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fair, J. E., & Parks, L. (2001). Africa on camera: television news coverage and aerial imaging of Rwandan refugees. *Africa Today*, 48, 35–57.
- Foster, H. (1988). Preface. In H. Foster (Ed.), *Vision and visuality* (pp. ix–xiv). Seattle: Bay Press.
- Fowler, J. (2004). *Sudan: Staring genocide in the face*. Washington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/alert/darfur/staring_genocide_in_the_face/. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Flint, J., & de Waal, A. (2005). *Darfur: A short history of a long war*. London: Zed Books.
- van der Gaag, N., & Nash, C. (1987). *Images of Africa: UK report*. http://www.imaging-famine.org/images_africa.htm. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Gregory, D. (1995). Between the book and the lamp: imaginative geographies of Egypt, 1849–1850. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers NS*, 20, 29–57.
- Guardian Unlimited. (2004). Sudan: a brief history. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/flash/0,5860,1275176,00.html>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Guardian Unlimited. (2006). Hear Africa 05. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/hearafrica05>. Accessed 26.09.06.
- Hughes, A., & Noble, A. (2003). Introduction. In A. Hughes, & A. Noble (Eds.), *Phototextualities: Intersections of photography and narrative* (pp. 1–16). Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press.
- Human Rights Watch. (May 2004). *Darfur destroyed: ethnic cleansing by government and militia forces in western Sudan*, New York. 16(6A).
- Human Rights Watch. (19 July 2004). Briefing Paper. *Darfur documents confirm government policy of militia support*, New York.
- Human Rights Watch. (2004). Darfur in flames. <http://hrw.org/photos/2004/darfur1/index1.htm>. Accessed 15.08.06.
- Human Rights Watch. (2005). Darfur: militia leader implicates Khartoum. <http://www.hrw.org/video/2005/musa/>. Accessed 15.08.06.
- ICID. (2005). Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1564 of 18 September 2004. New York, United Nations.
- International Crisis Group. (8 March 2005). Darfur: the failure to protect. Africa Report No. 89. Nairobi/Brussels.
- International Crisis Group. (17 March 2006). To save Darfur. Africa Report No. 105. Nairobi/Brussels.
- International Crisis Group. (20 June 2006). Darfur’s fragile peace agreement. Africa Briefing No. 39. Nairobi/Brussels.
- Jay, M. (1993). *Downcast eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jones, M. (19 January 2005). What put Sudan on the map? *AlertNet*. <http://www.alertnet.org/thefacts/reliefresources/11061528666.htm>. Accessed 17.08.06.
- Levi Strauss, D. (2003). *Between the eyes: Essays on photography and politics*. New York: Aperture.
- Luke, T. W., & O Tuathail, G. (1997). On videocameristics: the geopolitics of failed states, the CNN International and (UN)governmentality. *Review of International Political Economy*, 4, 709–733.
- Maynard, P. (1997). *The engine of visualization: Thinking through photography*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- McDonald, F. (2006). Geopolitics and ‘the vision thing’: regarding Britain and America’s first nuclear missile. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers NS*, 31, 53–71.
- McDonald, F., Dodds, K., & Hughes, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Geopolitics and visual culture: Representation, performance, observant practice*. London: I.B. Tauris, in press.
- Mirzoeff, N. (2005). *Watching Babylon: The war in Iraq and global visual culture*. London: Routledge.

- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (2002). Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1, 165–181.
- Moeller, S. (1999). *Compassion fatigue: How the media sell disease, famine, war and death*. New York: Routledge.
- Pieterse, J. N. (1992). *White on black: Images of Africa and blacks in western popular culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Poole, D. (1997). *Vision, race and modernity: A visual economy of the Andean image world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Powell, C. L. (2004). *The crisis in Darfur*. Washington, DC: Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/36042.htm>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Power, S. (2002). *A problem from hell: American and the age of genocide*. New York: Basic Books.
- Power, M., & Crampton, A. (2005). Reel geopolitics: cinemato-graphing political space. *Geopolitics*, 10, 193–203.
- Pronk, J. (12 January 2006). *We need more stories and more pictures*. World Press Photo Review.
- Prunier, G. (2005). *Darfur: The ambiguous genocide*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Rogoff, I. (2000). *Terra infirma: Geography's visual culture*. London: Routledge.
- Rorty, R. (1981). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Rose, G. (2003). On the need to ask how, exactly, is geography 'visual'? *Antipode*, 35, 212–221.
- Ryan, J. R. (1997). *Picturing empire: Photography and the visualization of the British empire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sengupta, S. (17 January 2004). War in western Sudan overshadows peace in the south. *New York Times*.
- Schwartz, J. M., & Ryan, J. R. (Eds.). (2003). *Picturing place: Photography and the geographical imagination*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Shapiro, M. J. (1988). *The politics of representation: Writing practices in biography, photography and policy analysis*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Steidle, B. (2005). 'In Darfur, my camera was not enough'. Washington, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/alert/darfur/steidle/>. Accessed 25.08.06.
- Thompson, M. (28 June 2004). Sudan: the untold story. *Poynteronline*. http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=67652. Accessed 17.08.06.
- Todorova, M. N. (1997). *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Verdirame, G. (2000). The genocide definition in the jurisprudence of the *ad hoc* tribunals. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 49, 578–598.
- de Waal, A. (25 July 2004). Darfur's deep grievances defy all hopes for an easy solution. *The Observer*.
- de Waal, A. (2004). *Who are the Darfurians? Arab and African identities, violence and external engagement*. London: Justice Africa. http://www.justiceafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/07/DeWaal_WhoAretheDarfurians.pdf. Accessed 25.08.06.
- White, H. (1978). *Tropics of discourse: Essays in cultural criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- World Food Programme. (2004). News — press release: renowned photographer James Nachtwey helps focus attention on Darfur crisis, 23 December. <http://www.wfp.org/english/?ModuleID=137&Key=1158>. Accessed 28.09.06.
- World Health Organization. (2005). Mortality survey among internally displaced persons and other affected populations in greater Darfur, Sudan.
- Wright, T. (2002). Moving images: the media representation of refugees. *Visual Studies*, 17, 53–66.