

Africa's Brutal Lebensraum

The New York Times

March 14, 2006

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BILDIQ, Chad

The villagers in this hamlet of thatch-roof mud huts told me that they had shot dead a member of the brutal janjaweed militia and pointed to his body. I walked over to look at the corpse — and his eyes opened.

He was a teenager, perhaps 16, shot down as he and four other raiders attacked this village along the Chad-Sudan border. Most of these villages near the town of Adé are unarmed, and it is easy for members of the Arab janjaweed to kill, rape and pillage with impunity, while yelling racial epithets against the black African tribes they attack. But someone in this village had an AK-47 and used it to fend off the attack.

The boy on the ground was slight and wearing old and filthy clothes. He followed me with his eyes for 10 seconds and then closed them, moaning softly. He had been shot in the waist and could not move.

The janjaweed are the brutes, armed and paid by the Sudanese government, who have engaged in a genocidal campaign to destroy villages of African tribes in the Darfur region of Sudan. Now Sudan, encouraged by the feebleness of the international community's response, is expanding the genocide by sending the raiders to attack the same tribes in neighboring Chad.

The villagers vowed not to kill the boy (they were indignant that I thought they might), and promised to turn him over to the government. And then they showed me someone still more interesting: another captured janjaweed youth who was able to tell his story.

This young man was tied up, not particularly harshly, in a hut. He had a bloody gash on his forehead where he had been hit with a machete, and it seemed he might lose his eye, but he was easily able to answer questions.

"My name is Isak Muhammad," he began. "I am 21 years old." Video of him, of the boy who was shot and of other scenes from my journey along the Chad-Sudan border, can be viewed [here](#).

Mr. Isak was not driven by racist abhorrence for the Wadai tribe of this village, for he is a Wadai himself. He said a militia leader had simply promised the raiders \$250 if they succeeded in killing the sheik, as a way to terrorize villagers and drive them away.

Where did the militia leader get his money? Almost certainly from the Sudanese government.

The Sudanese authorities may not have the money to feed their people, but they are spending lavishly on arming proxy forces to invade Chad, in hopes of destabilizing tribes and installing a pro-Sudanese pawn as the leader of Chad.

So the genocide is not just driven by hatred, but also by opportunistic mercenaries. Consider the founder of the janjaweed, Sheik Musa Hilal, a ferocious Arab nationalist who has shown particular vigor in slaughtering members of the Zaghawa tribe. According to a longtime acquaintance of Mr. Musa, the sheik's own mother is Zaghawa.

As in Rwanda or even during the Holocaust, racist ideologies sometimes disguise greed, insecurity and other pathologies. Indeed, one of the genocide's aims is to drive away African tribes to achieve what Hitler called Lebensraum: "living space" for nomadic Arabs and their camels.

So this village is simply a window into an entire region drenched in fear. Men walk about carrying homemade spears and machetes, and parents tie amulets around their children's necks.

As we left the village, I met a search party looking for six men who had disappeared after an attack by other raiders. "We heard gunshots over there a couple of minutes ago," said one man, pointing to a nearby hill. "We'll wait two hours and then go over and see who was shot."

As the local county leader, Saudi Hassan, puts it, "The janjaweed are using humans as targets — they kill a person as if he were a chicken." Whether the offenders are Nazis or Hutu extremists or Sudan's janjaweed, that is a crime not only against the victims but also against all humanity. You can get ideas about what you can do at www.savedarfur.org, the Web site of the Save Darfur Coalition, which is planning a major rally on the Washington Mall on April 30.

It is brutally demoralizing for people in these villages to be hunted down as if they were wild beasts, to have their children pulled from their arms and thrown into burning huts. But we should be just as demoralized by our own indifference. The shame belongs not to the good people of Darfur and Chad, but to ourselves.