

Review Essay Mamdani, Mahmood. 2009. *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics, and the War of Terror*. Pantheon Books: New York, 401 pps., index, map, biblio., \$26.95, ISBN 978-0-307-37723-4.

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This book became instantly controversial, probably more from the Darfur context and conflict it seeks to address than for its detailed scholarship and extensive research. Mamdani's book is nonetheless an important work. It is well known that the author of "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim" does not hesitate to tackle problematic issues, so there should be little surprise about the present book under review. Moreover, the saying about "shooting the messengers" easily comes to mind. There is no question that the discourse over the conflict in Darfur has been highly politicized and polarizing. My guess is that most readers have strong view on the subject *before* reading this book and are more interested in validating their views or rejecting others based on such *a priori* views. Just like the legalistic issue of 'genocide', the vast majority of people with views on this topic are, frankly, not lawyers or soldiers, are not trained Sudanists. They are rarely familiar with the legal importance of genocidal intent and would be offended if they themselves were charged, found guilty, and sentenced by another other single party, especially if the jury was composed of movie stars, politicians, and individuals with well- known biases. Thus, the first task of this book and its review is to open or reopen the minds of the public about this issue.

Let's see who might agree with Mamdani's latest book. Would some agree that this is a work of scholarship? Would they agree that this is a penetrating analysis of the causes and nature of the conflict in Darfur? Certainly when he gets into the meat of his subject he will find critics, strong supporters, and angry opponents with many shades in between. Thus, it is difficult to be fully objective or neutral about *Saviors and Survivors*.

One finds several groups interested in Sudan and its very complex, diverse and interconnected conflicts. There are veteran Sudanists and there are those with interests spanning a few years, or a few months. There are also peace-seekers, peace-makers, and peace-keepers; there are antagonists, persons in NGO's, politicians, soldiers, political activists, statesmen,

apologists, movie stars, strategists, victims, and victimizers, not to mention various rebels, informal militias and various other government and public actors. Practically all have differing points of view about the causes, effects and potential resolution of the war in Darfur, the general and provincial governance of Sudan, and the many other related issues and dimensions of contemporary Sudan. I am a veteran Sudanist anthropologist with four decades of research, I am also a peace-seeker with practical military experience (military teaching, subject matter expert, and front line war coverage), and human rights work (multiple Sudanese political asylum cases). Any reviewer enters this political terrain with reasonable trepidation, these remarks seek to clarify my background and interests.

Dr. Mamdani sees deep historical roots in the Darfur conflict. These range from the internal dynastic rivalries of kingdoms and states, to conflicts with neighbors, age-old core-periphery issues, and fundamental ideological disputes, as well as their various political objectives. I agree with Mamdani; other observers are more interested in simply projecting a demonical view of Khartoum and either ignoring the rebels or even creating them in a simple image of 'victims' or freedom fighters. Mamdani hopes that all observers see the women, children and displaced non-combatant people of Darfur as the victims of this strife.

Mamdani also sees the conflict in a long evolving climatological context in which global weather changes and desertification are important, but not exclusive causes. Others see that attention to climate change as a cause of conflict is diversionary from those they wish to blame for aggression and/or intransigence. I agree with the Mamdani position.

Mamdani reckons that tens or even hundreds of thousands have died, been wounded, abused, threatened and forced into miserable refugee status. Not only do I agree with this tragic human calculus of this conflict, but I wish the numbers were lower because we are talking about

human beings. Some wish or proclaim that the numbers were higher to dramatize the terrible situation. However horrible the numbers were in 2003 to 2005, they are happily much less at present. Indeed, the number of murders in Chicago in 2008 was greater than the number of conflict-related deaths in Darfur in the same period and south-on-south violence in the southern Sudan is showing an alarming upward trajectory, this added to the even greater number of deaths caused by the Lord's Resistance Army in northeastern Congo.

This leads Mamdani to the highly polarized debate about 'genocide' in Darfur. Let's take a closer look at the Nazi-inspired holocaust and the Rwanda for some guidance since these cases have been adjudicated and some punishments meted out. In these two widely accepted instances of recognized genocide the victims (communists, Jews, 'Gypsies,' gays; and Tutsi), were systematically hunted down to exterminate them.

This was the critical genocidal **intent**. There was no sanctuary in Germany or Rwanda for these targeted groups. For the populations of Darfur there *is* sanctuary in IDP camps, in adjoining provinces and nations, and even in the national capitol, which was militarily targeted by one Darfur rebel group. This was not the case in Germany or Rwanda. Furthermore, for the Nazis or Hutu, the genocidal intent was unilaterally initiated. This was not the case in Darfur where joint rebel forces unilaterally attacked government military positions, personnel and equipment. Yes, they had their grievances but taking a military option to represent them has a sorry, but well-known, history in Sudan. Taking up arms to 'protect' your people is an ethical or moral decision of grave implications, as we are in year six of this sustained conflict. This is Mamdani's position in essence. I share it.

Neither Nazis, nor Hutu offered a peaceful or negotiated way out for their victims. They were stopped by military force and prosecuted largely by the later victors. Not only were the

Darfur rebels repeatedly offered peace talks, one has signed, others rejected this and return to 'improve' their political positions on the battle fields despite multiple and varied international efforts to get them for formulate a common front and position. Now they are fighting as much with each other and well-intentioned NGO's, as well as with marauding civilians with their warlords. Again, there is no parallel with Jews, gays, or Tutsis. Personally, I believe that the hallowed nature of the term genocide, a crime so great that it deserves neither casual application nor simple use as an adjective or term of abuse that is applied blithely against your enemies. It is a legal and moral reference of the greatest significance. 'Genocide' has been incorrectly used to describe the post-election violence in Kenya, or at the bloody end to the Sri Lankan insurgency. Having many people die is obviously horrible in human terms, but such cases do not immediately qualify as genocide, and if this fine-tuned legal term is used too loosely, defensively and inaccurately it runs the risk of actually diminishing its true meaning. I'd guess that most modern nation-states, when confronted with armed rebels directly attacking their military would formulate a counter-insurgency strategy as best they could with what recourses they had. The government of Sudan was totally predictable in this respect by just looking at its use of the *murahileen* long employed in the stalemated 'jihad' in the south. However horrible, however misguided was the use of the *janjaweed* in Darfur, it was from the point of view of Mamdani and this reviewer, entirely predictable from the previous twenty years. The poor and probably illegal application of this force and the terrible miscalculations of the disparate and divided rebel groups contributed fundamentally to the high degree of lives lost, and displaced in the 2003-2005 period especially. Certainly other contributors were poor governance and administration, poor land registry, political and ideological ambitions, and too many people in a vulnerable and deteriorated ecosystem.

In addition, Jerry Fowler and the “Save Darfur” coalition comes under harsh scrutiny by Mamdani, especially for its marketing and fund raising which probably paid for many office and salary expenses in the United States, but it is not clear how many Darfuris it actually ‘saved.’ Moreover, important human rights groups have refrained from calling the bloodshed genocide. Such is also the case for the main Middle Eastern, Arab, and African political organizations. The three nations particularly focused on labeling Darfur as genocide have found roots in the United Kingdom, the United States, and in Israel, and I suppose that it goes without saying that these three nations have very problematic relations with the Arab world in general. The English were also the last colonial power in Sudan and were responsible for the assassination and overthrow of the last Sultan of Darfur; Israel hosts one of the Darfur rebel groups, has no diplomatic relations with Khartoum and has hostile relations with the Palestinian people it occupies and disperses in numbers exceeding those in Darfur. The United States is struggling to sort out its military, legal, and political problems in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. So the activities in these nations also need to be viewed in this wider context, just to level this complex international playing field. With such thoughts in mind, Mamdani sees that the charge of genocide needs a wider lens to see all its dimensions.

Speaking of wider dimensions, there is much more to Sudan than just Darfur. The hard-fought, hard-negotiated Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 has been diverted by the unilateral focus on Darfur. There the territorial unity of Sudan or more war is at stake, not to mention the role of China in Sudan, and the major amounts of oil in the southern Region. The boycott and sanctioning of the Sudan in past years managed to push out all American and Canadian oil companies; now China, India and Malaysia get that oil, the US gets none. The US sanctions against Sudan were exempted for the one item its economy needs, namely Gum Arabic.

The United States' effort to block arms purchases has also backfired to the extent that the Sudan is now utterly self-sufficient in arms production from small arms and up to heavy armor, and tanks, everything except for military aircraft that it buys from China with oil proceeds. This was not a major foreign policy success for the US. Beyond that, another less-noticed conflict in the eastern Sudan bubbled over into violence, but the number of external actors in this case was tiny and a peace accord was rather quickly reached and has held. The supernumerary actors in the Darfur conflict have, in fact, created so many more stakeholders that the end of the Darfur conflict has been far more elusive and delayed with more casualties.

Also notable is that the International Criminal Court has indicted Sudan President Omar al-Beshir for charge of war crimes, but has refrained from genocide charges. The legalistic unfolding and outcome of these allegations is still awaited. Africans have noted that neither the Sudan nor the United States are signatories to the ICC, but few Europeans have been charged and several African leaders are under indictment by nations that were former colonial powers. As a long-standing advocate of justice, I applauded the apprehension of Charles Taylor, Hissene Habre, and Fodah Sankoh because they deserve their hearings, but note that they were/are in custody. The indictment of Joseph Kony of the LRA has reduced his incentives for peace negotiation to zero and he responded with more round of killing in the Congo. Not to overlook the cause of justice, perhaps some tactical considerations could be made for the ICC with no police powers.

Mamdani also address the issue of racism in Darfur. Sudan is among the most diverse nations on the planet. Its history is long and its size is vast. There is no question of great achievements and great violence at different times by different actors. Prejudicial attitudes have evolved and do exist there. Amidst conflicts, our human pedigree seeks to 'other' those to whom

violence is directed. There is nothing unique about the Sudan on this matter. The issues of marginalization by the Jellaba core and the peripheries of Sudan are certainly part of the foundations of most of the divisive issues of Sudan today. Some journalists and activists try to capture the essence of Sudanese racism with simplistic ‘African vs. Arab’ polarities, but this reveals more of their ignorance than Sudanese reality. On the one hand, everyone in Sudan is African; the Sudan is in Africa. On the other, through the matrix of centuries of slavery, many in Sudan are both African and Arab. In addition, identity in Sudan is in a state of constant flux and situational reallocation and even those ‘arabs’ along the Nile could more honestly be considered as Islamized Nubians and the few ‘true’ ‘arabs,’ such as the Rashaidya, have almost nothing to do with Darfur. Other ‘arabs,’ like the Baggara, are generally not participating in the Darfur conflict and, if anything, also suffer for marginalized manipulation by the core for centuries. Maybe simplicities sell papers, generate honoraria, and mobilize followers, but Mamdani does an expert job in demonstrating that this has little to do with socio-cultural reality and with the major issues in political economy, demography and climate in Darfur. And what about the ‘Fellata’ of Sudan who may be one of the largest population groups after the post-Mahdist demographic collapse? But since these ‘nomads’ are not exactly ‘arabs’ or ‘Nilotic Africans’ we just let them sit quietly apart from the incomplete Sudanese ‘dialogue on race.’

Aside from stirring these much blown Sudanese sands, Mamdani makes a few errors and mistakes that might be addressed in subsequent editions. I am not noting these with the intention of undermining the overall message, but only to fulfill the constructive responsibility of a professional academic review. Among such problems are:

p. 22, it is Kribi, not Kibri in Cameroon.

p. 75, land of the Libyans is usually *Temehu* or *Temenu*, not *Thehemnu*

p. 75, land of the Blacks is usually *Ta-Nehesiu*, not *Tenehasu*

p. 76, Axum conquered Meroë, but did not annex it.

p. 76, Sudan was occupied by a foreign power long before 1821. Egypt occupied northern Sudan for the entire Egyptian New Kingdom of five centuries.

p. 77, William Y. Adams thinking about Nubian history is much more Sudano-centric than is represented in Mamdani's remarks.

p. 89, While Nubians had several kingdoms it would be a stretch to say there was a Beja state. And the Mamlukes were not exactly following 'runaway Arabs', but runaway opponents who survived their infamous Cairo massacre.

p. 92, It is *Ja'aliyin*, not *Ja'alist*.

p. 98, holy men (pl.) are *fuqaha*, not *fuqara*.

p. 131, Yes, slavery increased with the Turkiya, but this was not its advent in Sudan/Nubia. Slavery was practiced in all ancient and medieval times.

p. 131, 157, It is the *Fellata* who are of West African origin not particularly the *fuqara*, although they may be the poor *faqir*, but they are not especially known for their study of *fiqh* that could make them a *faqih* or *fuqaha* (pl.). It is the *fuqaha* who are Islamic teachers (p. 121), or holy men (p. 122) not especially the *fuqara*.

p. 131, The 'large scale merchants' could be termed the *kabir*, but not the *khabir* according to standard Arabic transliteration.

p. 136, the 'first colonization' of the northern Sudan was not the Turco-Egyptian in 1821, but was the Egyptian New Kingdom in the 16th century BCE.

p. 137, the concept of the *Mahdi* was far less an import from West Africa than it was from the Mahdi's Samaniya *tariqa* that is Shi'ite from Saudi Arabia and the first exposure to Islam for

Nubians, like the Mahdi himself, was during the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt that was also Shi'ite. I consider these points as worthy of academic debate, but not substantially changing his main message.

Finally, for all serious observers and policy makers, the situation in Darfur is fundamentally a complex political problem that needs a political solution. Neither for the rebels, nor for Khartoum will there be a military "solution." The decades of north-south fighting should have made this clear for both before starting their respective wars. A well rounded policy for Sudan needs to consolidate the joint political victories (and the memory of Colonel John Garang) embodied with the CPA, on more dialogue and less polarizing, less killing, more trust building, more protection of the non-combatants. The toned-down rhetoric of the 'war or terror' of the new US administration and the shutting down of Guantanamo (with some Sudanese inmates) may also make important contributions to dialogue and reopening the lines of communication that were shut down for eight years. Also needed are more logistic and financial supports and more capacity building for the AU/AMID, UNAMID forces who are truly the heroes of Darfur who are really risking and losing their lives in their devotion to Darfur peace keeping. These all seem to be on the mend and in upward motion. Probably Mamdani would be pleased to note that the new American Commander-in-Chief is taking a fresh look at Sudan with the appointment of Air Force Lt. Gen. Scott Gration and his Deputy from the State Department, Timothy Shortley who recently addressed the Sudan Studies Association meetings in 2009. Despite the Presidential campaign rhetoric of all candidates about no-fly-zones and 'boots on the ground' it appears that Africans will be solving this African problem and the United States is willing to help out without getting more over-extended. One 'battle ground' for these next

struggles will likely be within the State Department, the Congress, and between the White House and Darfur activists.

It is perhaps the case that present and past members of the Khartoum regime that need judgment about their acts in Darfur and elsewhere, but equally they did expel Osama bin Laden, they negotiated the ESPA, the CPA and at least a partial DPA with one Darfur group as well as constructed the GNU and the JIU with SPLA officials in top positions in government and in foreign embassies. Mamdani and this writer are painfully aware of the criticism and weaknesses in these actions and agreements, but they are still in place, however imperfect. Annual deaths in Darfur number in the hundreds, not the thousands as in 2003-2005, and many of these deaths are attributed to Darfur warlords and banditry. Likewise the imperfect north-south relations and the volatility of Abyei are evident, but south-south violence has taken more lives this year. Whatever one thinks about *Saviors and Survivors*, the study and practice of contemporary Sudanese politics, humanitarian concerns, peace-making and peace keeping has received a jolt to the present paradigms that may get us all thinking at a new level of depth. Let's hope that it will be lessons learned, and not repeated and congratulations to Dr. Mamdani for the clarity and courage to challenge conventional "wisdom".

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