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#### Gender and Genocide: Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur

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# **Gender and Genocide: Rape as a Weapon of War in Darfur** UMSL Ella Woods | Faculty Advisor Christoph Schiessl, Ph.D. | HON 2030 |

### Introduction

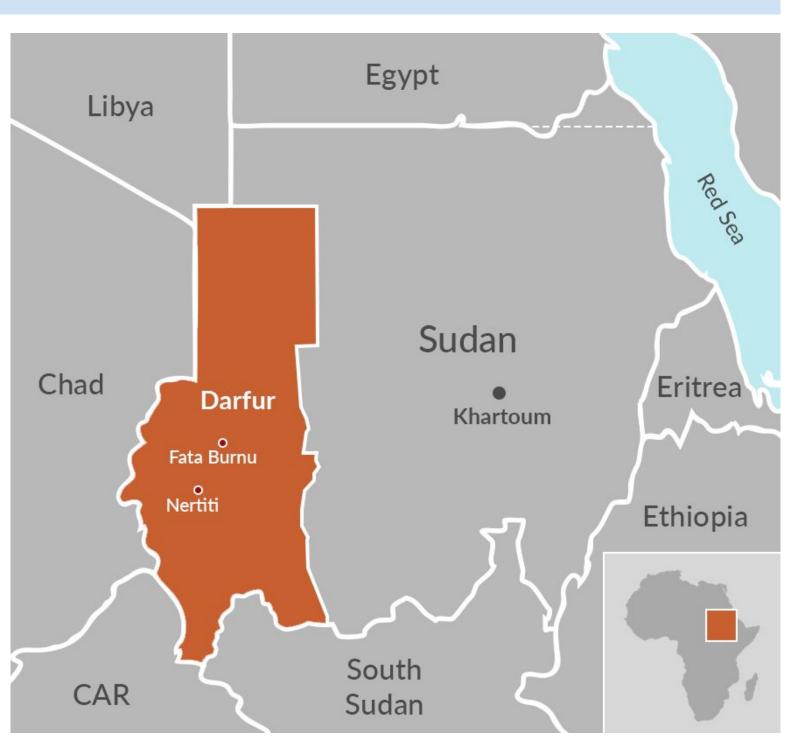
In instances of genocide, the women of a persecuted group face unique victimization. This has been the case in Darfur, where gendered violence has been a tool for the Janjaweed and the Sudanese military. The history of this conflict gives insight into how the international community can better protect women throughout the world.

## Background

- Fertile land in West Sudan inhabited by non-Arab African farmers, periodically shared with nomadic Arab groups
- Disputes over land in the 1980s led to Arab groups attacking farm villages
- Omar Hassan al-Bashir became president through a military coup in 1989
  - Authoritarian
  - Arabic supremacist
  - Disenfranchised Black Africans
- Coordinated with village attackers
- Janjaweed
  - Armed militia backed by the Sudanese government
  - Goal was to destroy the Black African population (primarily Fur, Massaliet, and Zaghawa tribal groups)
  - Carried out bombings, shootings, abductions, burned and looted property, tortured villagers
- Rebel groups took arms against the government in 2003

## **Darfur Today**

- 2019- Coup ending with peace agreement to transition to democracy
- 2020- UN closed Darfur peacekeeping mission
  - Led to resurgence in violence between rebel groups, armed militias, and government
- 2021- Military coup
- 2023- Multiple massacres in Darfur by Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary force composed of Janjaweed militias



- Victims were stigmatized and shunned by a culture that valued chastity Experienced humiliation, dehumanization, intimidation
- Abandoned by family members
- Left with no means of income
- Jailed and beaten for extramarital/premarital sex
- Disease, infection, permanent injury, infertility, psychological trauma Infanticide

## **Gendered Violence**

- Rape (in public, in victims' homes, in groups, in front of family)
- Genital mutilation
- Forced pregnancy
- Halted women from repopulating within their own ethnic group
- Abducted for sexual slavery
- Assaulted with foreign objects and weapons
- Victims ranged from 8 to 80 in age
- Single, married, and pregnant women
- Problems with underreporting but it's believed that tens of thousands of females were raped
- In almost every testimony provided, women who were sexually assaulted were also berated with racial slurs

Darfur Region of Sudan

https://issafrica.org/iss-today/darfurs-conflict-could-return-to-square-one

# **Impact on Darfuri Women**

# Conclusions

- The international community sets
  - international standards for recognizing mass rape as a tactic of genocide and is
  - responsible for condemning it
- We must be direct and outspoken about rape as a weapon of war if we want to prevent it in the future
- International law and humanitarian aid must reflect more than the male experience of genocide

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#### **International Response**

- The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia set a legal precedent in the early 1990s
- International Criminal Court (ICC) was established in the late 1990s
- The Women's Caucus for Gender Justice in the ICC established to incorporate gender-based crimes in the Rome Statute
- In 2005, ICC announced it was opening an investigation in Darfur
- Court indicted two high ranking officials for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur, including counts of rape
- In 2007, UN announced plan to send 26,000 peacekeepers to Darfur
- The ICC issued arrest warrants for al-Bashir in 2009 and 2010 for crimes against humanity, war crimes (including rape), and genocide • He remained president of Sudan until 2019
- In 2012, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese Defense Minister Abdelrahim Mohamed Hussein
  - Hussein went on to be governor of Khartoum from 2015-2019
- Obstacles for the ICC regarding Darfur: • USA was not a state party
  - Sudanese National Commission
  - Struggled to keep peacekeepers safe
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